

JUDAISM

RECEIVED

FEB 16 1993

A Memorial Tribute to Robert Gordis

Milton R. Konvitz

The Real Test of the Akedah

Lippman Bodoff

Moses: His Birth and Development

Allan Kensky

Ernest Neufeld

The Teaching of Ben Zoma

Mordecai Roshwald

ISSUE No. 165 / VOLUME 42 / NUMBER 1 / \$6.00

WINTER 1993

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS

STATEMENT OF SPONSORSHIP

The American Jewish Congress is sponsoring the publication of JUDAISM: A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF JEWISH LIFE AND THOUGHT as part of its basic policy to stimulate an informed awareness of Jewish affairs, encourage Jewish scholarship and adequate opportunities for Jewish education, and generally foster the affirmation of Jewish religious, cultural, and historic identity.

JUDAISM, conceived as a free and non-partisan organ, is dedicated to the creative discussion and exposition of the religious, moral and philosophical concepts of Judaism and their relevance to the problems of modern society.

Views and opinions expressed in the articles and reviews are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Editors or the American Jewish Congress.

NOTICE TO AUTHORS

The Editors are always pleased to examine material submitted for publication. Manuscripts should be sent to: Editors, JUDAISM, 15 East 84th St., New York, N.Y. 10028-0458. Unsolicited contributions will be returned only if accompanied by postage.

Material appearing in the pages of JUDAISM (except for brief passages cited for discussion) may not be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the Editors.

Articles published in this journal are abstracted and indexed in *Religious and Theological Abstracts*, *The Index of Jewish Periodicals*, *Humanities Index*, *Academic Index*, *Social Sciences Citation Index*, *General Periodicals on Disk*, and *Periodical Abstracts*.

JUDAISM: A QUARTERLY JOURNAL is published by the American Jewish Congress. It appears in Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall. Office of Publication: 15 East 84th St., New York, N.Y. 10028-0458. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y. POSTMASTER: send address changes to JUDAISM, 15 East 84th St., New York, N.Y. 10028-0458.

	Subscription Rates		Institutions/Libraries
	U.S.	Canada and Foreign	
1 year	\$20	\$22	\$35
2 years	36	40	65
3 years	50	56	90
* Student	10	12	—

Single copies: for individuals, \$6.00; for institutions/libraries, \$10.00.

* Orders and requests must be accompanied by valid, current student I.D.

All payments for subscriptions and mailings, including outside of the United States, must be paid for in American dollars and drawn on an American bank. Make checks payable to the order of JUDAISM, and send to 15 East 84th Street, New York, N.Y. 10028-0458.

Newsstand distribution in the United States by Bernhard DeBoer, Inc., 113 East Centre St., Nutley, N.J. 07011, and Fine Print Distributors, 6448 Highway 290 East, Austin, TX 78723-1038.

US ISSN 0022-5762

Copyright © 1993 by the American Jewish Congress.

JUDAISM

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL

Issue No. 165 / Volume 42 / Number 1 / Winter 1993

<i>The First Reader</i>	R.B.W.	3
<i>The Legacy of Robert Gordis: A Memorial Tribute On the First Yahrzeit</i>	MILTON R. KONVITZ	6
<i>The Teaching of Ben Zoma</i>	MORDECAI ROSHWALD	14
<i>Sinai And What Makes Us Jewish</i>	ELLIOT B. GERTEL	29
<i>Moses and Jesus: The Birth of the Savior</i>	ALLAN KENSKY	43
<i>The Redemption of Moses</i>	ERNEST NEUFELD	50
<i>Dilemmas of Modern Orthodoxy: Sociological and Philosophical</i>	CHAIM I. WAXMAN	59
<i>The Real Test of the Akedah: Blind Obedience Versus Moral Choice</i>	LIPPMAN BODOFF	71
<i>The Sacrifice of Isaac (poem)</i>	STEVEN SHOEMAKER	93
<i>Women and Prayer: An Attempt to Dispel Some Fallacies</i>	JUDITH HAUPTMAN	94
REVIEWS		
<i>Tradition or Modernity</i> Review-Essay on <i>Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew</i> by Neil Gillman and <i>Torah U'madda</i> Norman Lamm	STEVEN BAYME	106
<i>Groping for God</i> Review-Essay on <i>Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew</i> by Neil Gillman and <i>The Healer of Shattered Hearts: A Jewish View of God</i> by David Wolpe	ELLIOT N. DORFF	114
<i>The German-Jewish Economic Elite, 1820–1935: A Socio-Cultural Profile</i> by W.E. Mosse	MARSHA ROZENBLIT	124

Editor Emeritus
ROBERT GORDIS

Acting Editor
RUTH B. WAXMAN

Associate Editor
LIPPMAN BODOFF

Contributing Editors

EUGENE B. BOROWITZ, New York, N.Y. • EMIL L. FACKENHEIM, Jerusalem, Israel • MICHAEL FISHBANE, Chicago, Ill. • DAVID FLUSSER, Jerusalem, Israel • MARVIN FOX, Waltham, Mass. • MAURICE FRIEDMAN, San Diego, Cal. • JUDAH GOLDIN, Philadelphia, Pa. • MAX GRUENWALD, Millburn, N.J. • SUSAN HANDELMAN, College Park, Md. • MENAHEM HARAN, Jerusalem, Israel • ARTHUR HYMAN, New York, N.Y. • ERICH ISAAC, Irvington, N.Y. • MILTON R. KONVITZ, Oakhurst, N.J. • ARTHUR J. LELYVELD, Cleveland, Ohio • ANNE L. LERNER, New York, N.Y. • SOL LIPTZIN, Jerusalem, Israel • LEO PFEFFER, New York, N.Y. • EMANUEL RACKMAN, New York, N.Y. • NATHAN ROTENSTREICH, Jerusalem, Israel • ZALMAN M. SCHACHTER, Philadelphia, Pa. • DAVID WOLF SILVERMAN, Oakhurst, N.J. • SHEMARYAHU TALMON, Jerusalem, Israel • DAVID WEISS, New York, N.Y. • PAUL WEISS, Washington, D.C. • MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD, New York, N.Y.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless — the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

Judaism will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

The First Reader

In Memoriam

It is now approximately a year since the death of Dr. Robert Gordis, the former Editor and co-founder of JUDAISM. It is, therefore, fitting that we begin this issue with an article about him and his achievements, written by a friend of long standing, *Milton R. Konvitz*. "The Legacy of Robert Gordis: A Memorial Tribute On the First Yahrzeit" is but an encapsulation of much that Dr. Gordis achieved in his lifetime. All that he accomplished would require a book.

Ben Zoma Said . . .

The pithy statements in the *Pirke Avot* are full of meaning and that, undoubtedly, is one of the reasons for their fascinating appeal for countless generations. In "The Teaching of Ben Zoma," *Mordecai Roshwald* compares the dicta of Ben Zoma, a *tanna* of the second century of the Common Era, on wisdom, riches and honor, with the lengthy discussions of these three aspects of life by Plato and Aristotle. The result is a provocative treatment of that perennial question: "What is the good life?"

The Distinctiveness of Being Jewish

The controversy over Jewishness is generally thought of in terms of "Who is a Jew" and deals with the technical questions of descent. Not as frequently, the question is "What makes us Jewish?" Are we better than other people, or are we inferior to them? *Elliot B. Gertel* offers a number of answers in "Sinai And What Makes Us Jewish." All of them go back to that momentous experience in the desert.

A Variety of Views on Moses

The often-cited Talmudic adage about the richness of the Torah — "Turn it and turn it, for everything is in it" — is true to this very day. The problems and the personalities in it seem to have a message for every generation. No wonder, then, that the towering and complex figure of Moses continues to interest students of religion, whether amateur or profession-

al. In this issue of JUDAISM we have two papers that attest to this interest, one by a layman, *Ernest Neufeld*, "The Redemption of Moses," and the other, "Moses and Jesus: The Birth of the Savior," by *Allen Kensky*, who is a rabbi. Each paper starts from a different perspective, yet each manages to show us still more aspects of the greatest leader of the Jewish people than most of us remember from our initial study of the Bible.

Modern Orthodoxy Has Its Problems

Any one who has made a study of religious movements has surely come to the conclusion that no one of them is monolithic. There are sub-groups, right-wingers and left-wingers, sectarians and loyal dissidents. So, too, in Orthodoxy. How does it accommodate to contemporary society? What is its attitude to secular learning?

In this paper, "Dilemmas of Modern Orthodoxy: Sociological and Philosophical," *Chaim I. Waxman* points out some of the divisions. First there are the Sectarians and the Traditionalists. Then there are, within the "Modern" category, the "pick-and choosers" as well as the rigorous observers. And even within this last group there are variants. Hirsch, Breuer and Lamm are all Orthodox. How do they relate to each other? The author concludes that contemporary Modern Orthodoxy, as contrasted to Sectarian Orthodoxy, can never develop into a "movement" that would command the emotional attachment of a broad following.

A New Approach to the Akedah

Of all of the events in the Tanakh, the *Akedah* — the near-sacrifice of Isaac — has probably prompted the largest amount of controversial analysis and explanation. How could God ask for child sacrifice? How could Abraham, who had waited so long for the birth of Isaac, who was his only son by Sarah, be willing to sacrifice him? Why didn't Sarah have anything to say about what was happening to her only child?

Scholarly interpretations abound, and an interesting new one is offered by *Lippman Bodoff* in "The Real Test of the *Akedah*: Blind Obedience Versus Moral Choice."

Women and Prayer

One of the questions that has invited much Jewish awareness in our generation is: Are women, like men, required to pray? If so, what can be their role in public worship? Though the problem seems to be a contemporary one, prompted, as some people believe, by the rise of feminism as a movement, the truth is otherwise. The Mishnah (200–300, C.E.) already has opinions on it, and views on the matter have proliferated since then. That so many generations could continue to be intrigued by some aspect of the question is, in itself, a commentary on its importance.

In "Women and Prayer: An Attempt to Dispel Some Fallacies," *Judith Hauptman* cites the Talmud, as well as medieval and modern sources, to prove her point that halakhic attitudes "can change in response to evolving social attitudes."

Two Noteworthy Review-Essays

This issue of JUDAISM seems to have an abundance of unusual elements: a new format for footnotes, new type and column size for reviews (these are both matters of structure), and two review-essays (we usually try to limit ourselves to one per issue), both of which deal with one book as compared to two others. In "Groping for God," *Elliot N. Dorff* analyzes *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew*, by Neil Gillman, in comparison with *The Healer of Shattered Hearts: A Jewish View of God*, by David Wolpe. Here the comparison is between a Conservative and a Reform approach. In the review-essay, "Tradition or Modernity," *Steven Bayme* sets the Gilman book against *Torah U'Madda*, an Orthodox approach, by Norman Lamm.

A Slight Change In Our Looks

We are introducing two changes in format in this issue. One is that, in two instances, footnotes do not appear at the bottom of the page, but at the end of the articles. In future issues, all of the articles will be thus documented. The other is that the reviews now look different. Until now, reviews had been set in narrow double columns, in order to distinguish them from articles. We are abandoning those double columns (which always involved many broken words at the end of lines) for a different style and size of type and with the lines extended across the page. We hope that these changes will make reading our journal both simpler and more attractive.

R.B.W.

We deeply mourn the passing of
Rabbi Theodore Friedman,
 formerly a Managing Editor of JUDAISM
 and a member of
 the Board of Contributing Editors

יהי זכרו ברוך

The Legacy of Robert Gordis: A Memorial Tribute On the First Yahrzeit

MILTON R. KONVITZ

I

FOR MANY YEARS, DURING THE HOLIDAY OF Passover, when the *Song of Songs* is read in the synagogue, I turned to *The Song of Songs: A Study, Modern Translation and Commentary*, by Robert Gordis, not only to read his wondrously poetic translation and rendition into twenty-eight songs and fragments, but to study his detailed fifteen chapters and the scores of notes in his commentary. Although text and commentary have become familiar to me by an annual re-reading since the book's publication in 1954, the book remains an ever-fresh source of literacy, religious, and intellectual enjoyment. In 1992, the holiday came only several months after the death of Gordis on January 3, and, so, the sense of bereavement, deprivation, the feeling of heaviness of heart affected my study of the book, and I felt that my mood was more fit for *Lamentations* than for *The Songs of Songs*. The death of Robert Gordis brought to an end a most productive, creative, pulsating life, that of a person who stood tall among his peers, and who will be remembered as one of the outstanding scholars in the field of Jewish studies, whose name will evoke the same respect that we owe to rabbi-scholars like Solomon Schechter, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Louis Finkelstein.

The words "rabbi-scholar" are intentionally hyphenated, for these men, who, while pre-eminent for their meticulous, objective, and unprepossessed scholarship, were, at the same time recognized for their wide communal and leadership qualities as rabbis. Gordis served as rabbi of a large congregation for thirty-eight years. He established the first Conservative all-day school in the United States, now named the Robert Gordis Day School of Belle Harbor. He was president of the Rabbinical Assembly of America and of the Synagogue Council of America. He took an active part in interfaith activities. He was recognized as the leading philosopher of the Conservative movement, a role which came to final expression in his chairing of the committee which produced *Emet Ve'Emunah*, the first ever formulation for the ideology of Conservative Judaism.

All of this, and much more, can be mentioned about Gordis as a public figure. But there was another side to him that, in my estimation, was even more important. For twenty or more years he was professor of Bible

MILTON R. KONVITZ is Professor Emeritus of Law and of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University. He has been closely identified with JUDAISM since its inception.

and of philosophies of religion at the Jewish Theological Seminary, where his influence was felt by hundreds of students who became rabbis and scholars. In 1952 he was a co-founder of the quarterly journal, JUDAISM, and, for two score years, he served first as chairman of the board of editors and then as editor. The forty volumes of the journal, that were published while he was at the helm, will stand as a tribute to his indefatigable energies and creative qualities as editor.

And last, but most important of all, there are the twenty or more books that Gordis published, as well as the numerous scholarly articles that only a professional bibliographer can take into account.

The books can be put into two categories. First are the works on the Bible, particularly on the Wisdom literature. I have already mentioned his *The Song of Songs*, first published in 1954. Prior to that, in 1951, his massive study of Ecclesiastes was published as *Koheleth — The Man and His World*. In 1973, his treatise on that book was combined with the treatise on *Lamentations*. In 1965, he published *The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job*; in 1978 this work was replaced by an enlarged edition, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies*. In 1974, his treatise on *Esther* came out. These works alone, on five of the Wisdom books of the Bible, will suffice to sustain Gordis' reputation as a master of Bible scholarship, a field of study that has been much more cultivated by Christians than by Jews. In some respects, Gordis was a pioneer in dedicating himself to Bible studies, and has served as a role model for younger Jewish scholars.

When an East European rabbi was told of the magisterial commentary on the *Psalms* by Samson Raphael Hirsch, he remarked that the Lithuanian Jews *recited* the Psalms (*Tehillim*) and *studied* Talmud, but Hirsch *recites* Talmud and *studies* *Tehillim*. In this respect, *mutatis mutandis*, Gordis was a Hirschian. He tried to reclaim the Bible for respectable Jewish scholarship. For his pragmatic, hard-headed, rational bent of mind, that was always attracted to matter-of-factness, the Wisdom books were especially congenial and appealing.

His study in depth of the Wisdom literature inevitably gave Gordis insight into many aspects of Biblical scholarship in general, and at least three of his other works resulted from his intensive study: namely, *Poets, Prophets and Sages — Essays in Biblical Interpretation*, 1970; *Biblical Text in the Making*, 1971; and *The Word and the Book — Studies in Biblical Language and Literature*, 1976.

Taken together, his eight books on the Bible place Gordis in the very first rank of Biblical scholarship and, alone, will constitute an enduring monument to his eminence and authority.

Gordis' scholarship, as I have said, also falls into a second category: his books that manifest his character as rabbi and teacher, the rabbi whose duty it is to teach his congregation, his *edah*, the widely-dispersed community of Israel. In these volumes Gordis addressed many of the issues and

problems that modern life has created or accentuated for the Jew who has not been overwhelmed by the secularism that has become so pervasive. Into this category fall at least the following eight books: *Judaism for the Modern Age*, 1955; *Root and Branch — Judaism and the Free Society*, 1962; *Judaism in a Christian World*, 1966; *A Faith for Moderns*, 1966; *Sex and Family in the Jewish Tradition*, 1967; *Love and Sex — A Modern Jewish Perspective*, 1978; *Judaic Ethics for a Lawless World*, 1986; and his last volume, *The Dynamics of Judaism — A Study in Jewish Law*, 1990.

These books reveal a mind that may be best described as that of a Renaissance Man, a mind far removed from any suggestion of parochialism; a mind at home in different cultures and civilizations; a person who looks for truth and wisdom wherever they may be found, and who disregards no-trespass signs; a person who can speak of Judaism to Christians and secularists as easily and as comfortably as he can speak to professing Jews. Gordis was an American Jew but, also, a Jewish American, for he believed in the truth and importance of the Bill of Rights as well as in the truth and importance of the Ten Commandments. He believed in the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but, also, in God who is the creator of Adam and Eve, the progenitors of all mankind, of all men and women made in the image of God. Gordis held firmly to the principle of live and let live: he was tolerant of all things but superstition, cruelty, and hatred. He immersed himself often in the study of *Halakhah*, Jewish law, but he also had great regard for opinions and decisions of the United States Supreme Court, which he studied with open-mindedness and respect. Holding firmly to the Jewish this-worldly affirmation, Gordis held with equal firmness that, while the natural is holy as a manifestation of the Divine, the existence of the Divine draws the spirit toward a transcendental experience that brings a spiritual significance to human experience and life. The *Song of Songs*, he wrote, “is both the record of God’s revelation to man and of man’s aspiration toward the Divine.”

II

Robert Gordis might well have claimed, with justification, that his last book, *The Dynamics of Judaism — A Study in Jewish Law*, is both a record of God’s revelation to him and of his aspiration toward the Divine. For Gordis believed that revelation is “a meeting involving both God and man as active participants.”¹ Revelation, he maintained, is dynamic. There is continuity, as a deposit of past revelation, but there is also change, expressive of the newness of revelation (p. 75). There is constant interpretation of the past and reinterpretation, and both the interpretation and the reinterpretation are “words of the Living God” (p. 96).

1. *The Dynamics of Judaism: A Study of Jewish Law* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 82.

The book can justly be read as Robert Gordis' intellectual and religious last will and testament. As the Preface states, nearly all of the contents of the book were written especially for it. Gordis lived long enough to have completed the manuscript, including the Preface, but he unfortunately fell ill while reviewing the edited manuscript. The work was written when he was already an octogenarian, yet, at a time when the author enjoyed the mature, full vigor of mind and spirit. I think that, as he wrote the book, Gordis was happy that he was putting the finishing touches on the labors of his life. He did not try to say anything that he had not said before. He had thought and brooded over its contents long and over many years. This is precisely why the book is so important: it is a reaffirmation of his strongest faith, recorded in his mature, old age.

Gordis recognized that this volume would reflect the character of the author and the nature of his life. It would not, therefore, be a book written in an ivory tower; the author could not claim detachment from his station and its duties; he was dedicated to *Torah lishmah*, to learning for its own sake, learning with no ulterior, no practical purpose, *and* to learning for the sake of his life, *Torat hayyim*, learning with a pragmatic end in view. It is not easy, or perhaps even possible, always to keep these two activities separated. They often intertwine, for Gordis was no split-personality, a scholar in the morning and a famous, busy rabbi in the afternoon. I think that Gordis as a rabbi believed that he also had to be a scholar, and, as a scholar he believed that he had to be a rabbi. The two callings were sometimes in dialectical tension, that was resolved and harmonized by a supervening spirit that made him the whole person who was the author of *The Dynamics of Judaism: A Study in Jewish Law*.

III

A central thought of the book is that Judaism is not a religion that, in the past, was often identified as the "Mosaic faith." Nor is it solely the religion of the Mishnah and Talmud. The special character of Judaism, said Gordis, is the fruit of development (p. 2). Contrary to Arnold Toynbee, Judaism is not a fossilized religion. The "dialectic of continuity and change" (p. 75) has almost always been characteristic of Judaism. What Roscoe Pound said of the law in general may be said of Judaism and of Jewish law: "The law must be stable, but it must not stand still."² This may sound paradoxical, the affirmation of contradictions, but life and the world are not based on the rules of logic; they operate not on the principle of either/or, but on the principle of both/and. "Evermore in the world," said Emerson, "is this marvelous balance of beauty and disgust, magnificence and rats."³ He might have added "stability and change, permanence and alteration."

2. Roscoe Pound, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Law* (1922).

3. Emerson, *The Conduct of Life* (1860), VII.

Insofar as Judaism is a Biblical religion, it developed, over the centuries, says Gordis, a unique character that differentiated it from all paganism. First, Judaism is a faith that represented the commitment of, and to, an entire people; the covenant is not with any special group, a caste of priests or members of a superior class — “God’s covenant encompassed an entire people” (p. 2, note 1). Second, the covenant was, and is, ethical in character. And third, Israel enjoyed a unique religious leadership in the prophets, whose central demand was for righteousness. The sages and rabbis who followed sought to embody the Biblical-prophetic principles of righteousness into halakhah, the laws and way of life. Because of the loss of the Temple, the sages and rabbis felt that the great need was to preserve Judaism and the Jewish people, and they resorted to an emphasis on rites and ritual — on the ceremonial law — to achieve these ends (p. 4). Religion, culture, and kinship became interrelated in Judaism. Other ancient peoples also had these three characteristics, but only the Jewish people and Judaism have survived, and Jews continue to constitute a unique people by organically combining these three elements (Ibid.)

The Jewish people have a long history, a religion and a culture that have a very rich past, but not everything in a people’s past is usable. At least three principles of Judaism stand out as special from the total tradition and cannot be discarded; they are, above all other aspects of the Jewish tradition, of supreme usefulness, now and ever, and these are:

First, the principle that life must be affirmed — “*affirmation of life as a good here and now*, including all its physical and spiritual aspects, and in spite of all its frustrations and agonies” (p. 15). Gordis quoted with eager approval the statement in the Talmud that “every human being is destined to render an account before God for all the blessings of the world that his eyes beheld and that he did not enjoy” (p. 16).

Second, the principle of self-fulfillment. This flows naturally out of the first principle, the affirmation of life. By self-fulfillment a person affirms his or her life. “If I am not for myself, who will be for me?”⁴ “If I am here, all is here, and if I am not here, who is here?”⁵ “Love thy neighbor *as thyself*.”⁶ One must begin with love of oneself.⁷

Just as there are commandments between one person and another, and commandments between a person and God — *mizvot bein adam leha-vero*, and *mizvot bein adam laMakom*, — so, too, there are *mizvot bein adam le’azmo*, commandments between a person and himself or herself: “the obligation of a human being to preserve his physical and mental well-being and, above all, to safeguard his personal integrity and purity — in a word, to refrain from sinning against himself.” This is a category of command-

4. *Avot*. 1:14.

5. B. *Sukkah* 53a.

6. *Levit.* 19:18.

7. Cf. Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (1957), p. 60 ff.

ments that ought to be recognized as existing at the very core of Judaism. Its recognition

would effectively rebut the notion of “victimless crimes” and stigmatize practices like alcoholism, prostitution, drug abuse, and suicide as infractions of the moral law. Indeed, the Jewish tradition considers the Biblical injunction “Take utmost care and watch yourselves scrupulously” (Deut. 4:9, cf. v. 15) as the basis for the religious duty to take care of one’s health and well-being.⁸

Just as self-fulfillment flows out of the principle of the affirmation of life, so, too, the principle of social justice flows from the commandment of the affirmation of life.

It is because each human being has a right and a duty to enjoy the blessings of the world that justice is a universal obligation. Injustice in all its forms means the encroachment by one person or group on the legitimate and inalienable right of another to partake of the joys available in this world, in which all human beings have a share (p. 22).

As expressive of the spirit of Judaism, Gordis quotes the Hasidic rebbe who declared, “Why do you worry about my soul and about your own body? Worry about my body and your own soul!” (Ibid.)

One may, writes Gordis, accept the opinion of Rabbi Akiba that the Golden Rule of Judaism is the great principle, *kelal gadol*, the fundamental commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself;” or one may prefer the statement of Ben Azzai, that the foundational principle of Judaism is the passage in Genesis (5:1): “This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God; male and female He created them.” It does not matter, for there is “no denying that ‘the great principle of the Torah’ is ethical” (p. 123).

The principle of the affirmation of life, and the principle of self-fulfillment, with its implication that the right of self-fulfillment means also the duty of sharing in the blessings of the world, “all unite to establish the ideal of justice as the cornerstone of Jewish ethics (p. 23).

Yes, justice is the cornerstone of Judaism — Gordis did not tire of emphasizing and restating this principle. Not love but justice. Perhaps some persons can feel the emotion of love for people far removed from them, on the other side of the globe, but for mankind, in general, to use “love” in this way verges on cant. The most that can be demanded

is that we respond to all other human beings in the spirit of justice, no matter how far away or how different they may be. Nor do we require any other standard. Justice is enough. It applies equally to all persons by virtue of their common humanity, their innate dignity as children of God, and their inalienable right to the blessings of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (p. 25).

Even God Himself is bound by the demands of justice (“Far be it from Thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” [Gen. 18:25]). “Clear-

8. Gordis, *Op cit.*, note 1, pp. 21, 33, 63.

ly,” says Gordis, “justice is the ultimate value to which God’s will must conform” (p. 67). “. . . [I]n Jewish tradition and law, the ethical is the highest rung on the ladder of faith” (p. 68).

Because, following the destruction of the Temple by the Roman army, the ceremonial law was emphasized as a unifying force of the Jewish people, the impression may have been created that rites and rituals are all-important. They are, indeed, important, says Gordis, “But what of the relative importance of ritual and ethics in Judaism? . . . Here the evidence in both the Bible and the Talmud, though often overlooked, is extensive and unequivocal — ritual is important but ethics is paramount” (p. 64). In the liturgy of Yom Kippur, the central feature is the recital of the *al het*, the “great confession.” Gordis calls attention to the fact that of the forty offenses that are listed, “all are ethical sins, not one a ritual transgression . . .” (p. 67).

In view of the centrality of ethics, justice, and righteousness, it is not surprising that Gordis should give to the status of women in Jewish law more extensive consideration than to any other feature of halakhah. He believed that the “greatest revolution” of modern times is the change in the status of women (p. 145). In view of the fact that women constitute at least one-half of the world’s population, Gordis may well be right. He finds many things that need correction — indignities, injustices, improprieties, humiliations that cry for removal or correction. But Gordis was not one who despaired. As a scholar who was intimately aware of all the legal details, and the wrongs that need amelioration, he also saw that the Jewish tradition had a trend in the right direction. “It is not strange,” he wrote, “that women began with many disabilities. What is remarkable is the ongoing effort in Judaism to enlarge their rights and opportunities and to limit the powers and prerogatives of men, a pattern that may be traced from the biblical and rabbinic periods to the present” (p. 149). One of the most interesting and useful aspects of *The Dynamics of Judaism* is the documentation that it provides to prove the correctness of this far-reaching judgment.

Gordis’s approach to the problem of women and to halakhah in general reminds me of William James’ statement that he was not an optimist and not a pessimist but one who believed in amelioration. Nothing is inevitable, and the possibility of improvement is ever-present. Gordis was a meliorist, for that is what Judaism imposes upon its adherents — the people of Israel are commanded to act *mipnei tikkun ha’olam*, “for the improvement of society,” for the correction of the unfinished world, for doing the work that the Creator left undone (p. 124). The Jew “comes [into the world] with work to do, he does not come to coo.”⁹

But, for Gordis, meliorism implies change, improvement on an existing situation; something that is wrong calls for replacement with some-

9. “Peace,” by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

thing that is better. Judaism involves the use of two forces to accomplish a change for the better — namely, reason and moral conscience — both of them attributes that are *helek Elo'ah mim'a'al*, “a portion from God above” (p. 80, note 1).

Throughout Jewish history, these two great canons of reason and moral conscience have been the means by which Jewish leadership received the traditional inheritance of the past and preserved it for the future. In the majority of instances, the tradition could be and was maintained with little or no change. But when change became necessary, the Rabbis did not hesitate to evaluate the tradition and modify it before handing it over to their successors. They recognized that successive generations of scholars were not merely repeating traditions and decisions from the past, but were revealing new and unfamiliar aspects of the Torah. It is not without interest that the comments of scholars on the work of their predecessors are called *hiddushim*, “novellae,” “new interpretations” (Ibid.).

The rabbis and sages firmly believed that the Torah embodied “the highest spiritual and ethical values,” and, therefore, they did not hesitate to interpret the Bible “freely, invoking one procedure in one case and a diametrically opposite one in another, depending on the goal they sought to achieve” (p. 81), and the goal was always justice, righteousness, and ethical value.

A large part of *The Dynamics of Judaism* discusses numerous instances of this process of ameliorating halakhic decisions and legislation, and the possibility of using the process — reason and the moral conscience — especially in the area of the status of women. This aspect of the work happily makes the book itself a *hiddush*, a new, creative interpretation, by one who had a deeply pious regard for tradition — a tradition that contains in itself a program and a process for change that will bear witness to both reason and the demands of the moral conscience. It is a work of consequence. It was written by a man whose life, character and mind reflect an intense and life-long study of the Wisdom books of the Bible.

The Teaching of Ben Zoma

MORDECAI ROSHWALD

1.

You, my friend — a citizen of the great and mighty and wise city of Athens — are you not ashamed of heaping up the greatest amount of money and honour and reputation, and caring so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul?¹

IN THESE WORDS, SOCRATES DESCRIBES THE manner in which he would approach his fellow citizens in order to exhort them to the right of way of life.

In a similar vein, Plato, in *The Republic*, refers to “three classes of men — lovers of wisdom, lovers of honour, lovers of gain,”² and extols life devoted to the pursuit of wisdom as the best; life dedicated to the quest of honour as second in worth; and the life of the money-maker as the last in value.³

Aristotle echoes and reiterates these sentiments, praising the contemplative activity (i.e., the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake) as the prime choice. Yet, he emphasizes that the three options are not mutually exclusive, for even the wise man requires “the necessities of life,” while politics and warfare, which express the quest of honour, are accorded “nobility and grandeur among practical activities.”⁴

The purpose of this paper is not to discuss the position of the Greek philosophers in this matter, even though their stand may be relevant to our times, as we make our own choice as to the right focus in our individual lives. Our intent is to clarify the position, concerning or related to these three cardinal pursuits, of Ben Zoma, a *tanna* (Talmudic sage) of the second century C.E., as expressed in *Pirke Avot* (translated as “Chapters of Fathers,” or “The Wisdom of the Fathers”).⁵ The sayings of Ben Zoma, formulated in the terse and pithy manner characteristic of *Pirke Avot*, are parallel or closely

1. Plato, *Apology*, 29 (Jowett's translation).

2. The following quotations are from *The Republic*, Book IX, 581.

3. *Ibid.*, 582–583.

4. See Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, vii, 1177a–1177b (Translation by J.A.K. Thomson).

5. *Pirke Avot*, being a tractate of the *Mishnah*, can be found in its Fourth Order, *Nezikin*. It is also printed in full in every traditional Jewish prayer-book. Of English translations, let us mention one in paperback, which includes a selection of traditional commentaries. It is by Judah Goldin, published under the title *The Living Talmud* (Mentor Books, New American Library, 1957).

MORDECAI ROSHWALD is Emeritus Professor, University of Minnesota.

related to the above statements of Plato and Aristotle, though the conclusions need not be identical. It is this affinity which suggests relating the *tanna's* dicta to the opinions of the Greek philosophers, despite the different cultural spheres of Judaism and Hellenism, and the assertive, rather than dialectical, nature of the rabbinical maxims.

While the dicta of Ben Zoma are terse and seemingly simple, they hide profound reflection and, indeed, a philosophy of life. It is the aim of this paper to reconstruct and reveal this philosophy by means of a careful analysis of the maxims in the context of the *tannaitic* world.

Ben Zoma says: Who is wise? He who learns from every man. For it is said, "From all my teachers, I got understanding [for thy precepts are my meditation]" (Psalm 119:99).

Who is a hero? He who subdues his [evil] drive. For it is said, "He that is slow to anger is better than a hero; and he that ruleth his spirit [is better] than a conqueror of a city" (Proverbs 16:32).

Who is a rich man? He who is happy with his portion. For it is said, "When thou eatest the labour of thy hands, happy shalt thou be and it shall be well with thee" (Psalm 128:2). Happy shalt thou be in this world, and it shall be well with thee in the world to come.

Who is an honoured man? He who honours [other] people. For it is said, "For I will honour those that honour me, and those that despise me will be slighted" (1 Samuel 2:30).⁶

It may be noted that the epigrams of Ben Zoma offer a kind of justification by adducing a Biblical quotation. This well known method of adding weight to an opinion, by linking it to the sacred and venerated text, was employed by later rabbinical sages, as well as by medieval philosophers, Jewish and Christian, such as Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas.

The Biblical quotation, as illustrated in the sayings of Ben Zoma, could be directly supportive of the *tanna's* opinion, or "stretched" in a variety of ways to suit his purpose. Thus, in the second dictum, concerning the hero, the Biblical verse is similar in spirit to Ben Zoma's own statement, which is not necessarily true in the other cases.

In the case of the wise man who learns from everybody, the supporting verse from the Psalms is somewhat equivocal. The Hebrew phrase translated into English, "From all my teachers I got understanding," could also be rendered as "I am wiser *than* all my teachers." It is the latter translation which is, in all likelihood, the correct one, if one reads the verse in the context of Psalm 119. The meaning of the whole verse would be: "As it is thy precepts, O God, that form the subject of my meditation, I am wiser than all my teachers." In all probability Ben Zoma understood the verse in this way, but took advantage of the ambiguity of the Hebrew phrasing to make use of the verse in support of his maxim.

6. The quotation is from *Pirke Avot*, Chapter 4:1. The translation from the Hebrew text is by the present writer. The Biblical quotations used in the passage from the *Mishnah* follow the King James version, but they are occasionally modified to bring them closer to the letter and spirit of the Hebrew text.

In the instance of the dictum concerning the honoured man, we again face an adaptation of the quotation to Ben Zoma's need. The verse from I Samuel is attributed to God, who rebukes Eli for the transgressions of his sons, and says: "I (God) will honour those (men) that honour me." The use of this statement as a guide to inter-human relations is not self-evident, to say the least. However, taken out of context, the verse may read like a testimony to relations among human beings, to the effect that he who is honoured by his fellow beings, honours them in return — which comes close to Ben Zoma's dictum.

The quotation related to the nature of the rich man does not seem to be directly related to this dictum, for the Biblical verse speaks of the satisfaction with the fruit of one's labour, while Ben Zoma speaks of one's happiness with one's share or portion. Here, the relationship between the maxim and the Biblical verse seems complementary, as we shall see further on.

As to the intended comparison between the three Greek pursuits and the four types of Ben Zoma, it should be noted that two of the latter — the hero and the honoured man — seem to correspond to the pursuit of honour in Plato's dialogues. Indeed, Plato specifically refers to both, social recognition and martial achievements, when he asserts that "honour or victory or courage" are the objectives of those who see the pursuit of honour as their purpose in life.⁷

2.

"Who is wise? He who learns from every man." While this proposition may seem to express good common sense, as it is based on the assumption that grains of truth, however scanty, may be found everywhere, the assumption is not self-evident and, in a way, may contradict the basic stance of traditional Judaism and, incidentally, of Plato's philosophical position.

For the prevalent belief of the *tannaim*, which was crucial in forming the Jewish attitude for subsequent centuries, was that the Torah, the Divine teaching, ought to be the focus, perhaps even the exclusive domain, of study. Implicit in this belief is the view that the Torah is the source of wisdom, and those learned in the teaching of the Lord are the right guides for those who seek learning. *Pirke Avot* is replete with maxims to that effect. Let us quote a few.

"Rabbi Elazar says, Be diligent to study Torah."⁸ "Rabbi Meir says, Reduce your involvement in business and make yourself busy with the Torah."⁹ The Torah is extolled as the exclusive source of knowledge and wisdom by Ben Bag Bag, who says: "Turn it over and over, for everything is in it."¹⁰ Consequently, the wise men or sages, who are learned in the

7. *The Republic*, Book IX, 582.

8. *Pirke Avot*, 2:19.

9. *Ibid.*, 4:12.

10. *Ibid.*, 5:25.

Torah and its interpretation, are to be sought out by people. Thus, Yosef ben Yoezer offers the advice: "Let your home be the house of assembly of the wise (the rabbinical scholars) and let yourself be covered by the dust of their feet (sit at their feet), and thirstily drink their words."¹¹ In a similar vein, Rabbi Eliezer offers the advice: "Warm yourself at the fire of the wise (the scholars)."¹²

This approach parallels Plato's insistence that wisdom and knowledge are attained by the philosophers. The truth resides in the world of ideas, and access to it requires the training and dedication of the philosopher. The Jewish approach substitutes the Torah, the word of God, for the world of ideas, and the rabbinical exegetical approach for the quest of the philosopher.

The rabbinical insistence that the study of the Torah ought to be pursued for its own sake and made "neither a crown to aggrandize oneself nor a spade to dig with,"¹³ that is to say, that learning should not be used either for social distinction or as a means for personal gain, is in line with the Aristotelian glorification of intellectual activity pursued for its own sake.¹⁴ The Aristotelian *vita contemplativa*, a life focussing on the search for philosophical wisdom, is virtually as sanctified by the Greek philosopher¹⁵ as the life centering on the study of the Torah is by the Jewish sages.

Both the Greek and the Judaic approaches, as outlined above, imply the elusive nature of wisdom and the effort involved in its pursuit, which make the wise a select group. Aristotle demands a dedication to intellectual activity, which is not likely to be every man's choice. Plato, in *The Republic*, specifically singles out the philosophers as a very select group of people who dedicate their whole life to their avocation. Indeed, as well known, he entrusts them with the rule of his ideal state, for it is they, and not the common people, who know what is true and what is right, and, thus, are qualified to guide and lead the society and the state. The exhortations of the Sages in *Pirke Avot* insist on the wisdom of the Torah and on the guidance to this wisdom provided the rabbis. The rabbinical approach to wisdom seems to exclude any alternate avenues, as much as does Plato's view. The road to truth is one, and those who pave it must be recognized and followed. There is authoritative wisdom, and there is no point in looking for enlightenment in other quarters.

Looked at from this perspective, the dictum of Ben Zoma strikes one

11. Ibid., 1:4.

12. Ibid., 2:15.

13. Ibid., 4:7.

14. See Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, vii, 1177a-1177b.

15. Note the following: "So if the intellect is divine compared with man, the life of the intellect must be divine compared with the life of a human being" (Ibid., 1177b). And further: . . . "[W]e do all that we can to live in conformity with the highest that is in us" (Ibid.).

as odd and eccentric, not to say, outright contradictory. For Ben Zoma's wise man is not one who explores the meaning of the Torah, or follows in the steps of the sages who dedicate their lives to the study of the Torah, but one "who learns from every man." This does not mean, however, that Ben Zoma belittled the Torah and its study and the tradition of learning pursued by the *tannaim*, of which he, himself, was one. It does mean that Ben Zoma saw importance also in the experience and reflection of ordinary people. The maxim does not contradict the traditional perception about the wisdom of the Torah; it only amplifies it by another source of knowledge derived from common people. Every human being is implicitly assumed to have some kind of wisdom, some true opinion, and the wise man is he who is ready to cull the truth from this wide pool of humanity.

This approach carries two important assumptions or implications. One is of a philosophical nature. It encourages learning based on induction, on the absorption of a wide experience, besides the deductive knowledge arrived at from the interpretation of the Torah. To be sure, the rabbinical tradition in the age of the *tannaim* and in subsequent centuries was never purely deductive, for the juridical decisions of the rabbis on various actual or theoretical legal issues were often at least partially based on individual judgment, which must have been affected by their experience, and by the facts before them. The rabbis often combined the deductive legal conclusion, derived from a Biblical injunction, with a personal judgment *ab aequo et bono*. Yet they, almost as a rule, tried to find legitimation in the Holy Scriptures for their legal opinion or adjudication in a specified case, and in this sense were committed to the perception of knowledge and wisdom as being a deductive process. Ben Zoma throws the gate open for the inductive pursuit of knowledge and wisdom through the experience of diverse humanity.

Another assumption is of a social nature. Learning from every man implies that all men partake of knowledge and wisdom. If the superior knowledge of the rabbis, or the Platonic philosophers, implies a degree of elitism, the approach of Ben Zoma leans to egalitarianism and may be regarded as an expression of a democratic disposition. To be sure, no rabbi would have excluded anyone willing and eager to study Torah from this pursuit, as Plato would have done in his ideal state in respect of those not qualified to become philosophers or not needed to fill their ranks. Yet, in practice, the realm of rabbinical wisdom was restricted to the few who had actually achieved the distinction of being learned and wise. Ben Zoma insists that there is wisdom — some wisdom, at least — in the many, irrespective of their scholarly qualifications.

Yet, this stance does not mean that Ben Zoma considered all men equal in their wisdom. For if the wise man is "he who learns from every man," this need not indicate that every man is wise. There are the many who have some truth to teach or some instructive experience, but it may

be only the few who are capable of learning from the experience of humanity, from the insights of diverse individuals. Such learning may require discrimination and judgment which is not the capacity of everybody. The many may be an important source of wisdom, but it is up to the wise men to draw on this source, to sift that experience, and to absorb it into a coherent and authoritative whole.

3.

"Who is a hero? He who subdues his [evil] drive." This dictum presents some problems for the translator. The Hebrew word *gibor* is often translated as "mighty man." We have chosen "hero," to indicate that not only physical qualities, but, also, courage and determination, are factors in the make-up of a person who is denoted by this appellation. Another difficulty is the translation of *yezer*. It can be, and has been, conveyed in English by such words as "impulse," "passion," "inclination," "lust." What has to be borne in mind is the Judaic notion that man is driven by two opposite elemental forces, each of which is a primary energy, namely, the good drive and the evil one. These forces are more than a mere impulse or passion, for they seem to have a virtually exclusive sway over the individual, or, rather, strive with each other to dominate a person and to control his actions for good or for evil. "Drive" may convey this sense perhaps better than the other words. In the quoted statement, though the text merely refers to *yezer*, or drive, it is implicitly meant to indicate the *evil* drive. Hence, our insertion of "evil" in brackets.

Interestingly, the distinction between the evil and the good forces in the human soul and the concern about the dangers incurred from the evil propensity are clearly expressed by Plato. In *Phaedrus*, he presents the human soul as composed of a pair of winged horses and a charioteer. One of the horses is noble and the other ignoble, one is good and the other is bad. One pulls the soul to nobility and goodness, and the other to depravity and evil.¹⁶ A similar approach is presented in *The Republic*, where the evil impulses of man are likened to a wild beast, which ought to be controlled by reason in order to ensure the virtuous life. Without such control, man goes astray, and his personality is corrupted and perverted.¹⁷

While Ben Zoma, in his epigrammatic statement, does not elaborate on the nature of the evil drive, nor does he look for illustrations and similes to describe it, he essentially holds the same position as Plato: the evil drive in man ought to be controlled. While agreeing with the Greek philosopher in substance, the *tanna* conveys his opinion in a different man-

16. See *Phaedrus*, 246 and 253–256.

17. *The Republic*, Book IX, 571–574. Cf. also the following: "Is not the noble that which subjects the beast to the man, or rather to the god in man; and the ignoble that which subjects the man to the beast?" (Ibid., 589.)

ner: he does not address the issue of the right balance in the human soul; he does not consider the fundamental problem directly. Instead, he appends his conviction to a common notion about an admired type, the hero, and expresses his opinion through a definition of the type.

Indeed, by defining the hero as one who subdues his evil drive, he expresses more than the Greek philosopher. For, in fact, he makes two statements. One, is that the hero, the mighty and illustrious warrior, the man who seeks public recognition and admiration, may not deserve such an elevated status. This stand is not explicitly articulated, but it may be inferred. For even if Ben Zoma is not outrightly disparaging towards the conventional hero, he has nothing positive to say about him. The other statement he makes, and makes explicitly, is that the control of one's evil impulses, of the evil force in man, is a heroic achievement, and is truly laudable. Thus, in a single statement, a moral judgment is passed on two different types or ideals.

It may be added that, by switching the notion of the hero from one type to another, Ben Zoma not only states a position in respect of these two diverse ideals, but also relates them to one another and, by comparing them, insinuates a social value system. "Look at the two types," he seems to point out. "One is admired by the public and covered with glory, but this says nothing about his inner life, about his soul, about his spiritual equilibrium. The other, while apparently indifferent to the admiration of the outer world, is in full control of his own life and action. He steers his life along the path of virtue. He is intrinsically good rather than obtaining his worth through the approval of the public and the admiration of the people, who often may value the wrong things."

4.

"Who is a rich man? He who is happy with his portion." The statement runs contrary to the accepted opinion — at any time and place — that the rich man is one who has amassed an unusual amount of possessions. This common perception is based on the assumption that the richer a man is, the better for him. Thus, riches become a limitless objective. Ben Zoma, in his statement, questions these assumptions. Instead of the endless quest and pursuit, he suggests contentment with one's possessions. One could say that he transfers the focus of the quest for riches from the economic sphere to the domain of psychology. Riches ought to be measured not by the accountant but by the psychologist, not by the material possessions but by the mental satisfaction of the possessor.

This position seems to contain its own rationale and justification. By offering a psychological criterion for riches, it makes them relatively easy to obtain, whereas riches, which inherently know no bounds, are doomed never to be satisfactory. Thus, the dictum offers solace to man, while rejecting the restless pursuit which has no end and affords no peace. It

praises the ideal of a man at peace with his material achievements, as against the restless Faustian striver in the economic sphere.

There may be, however, an additional meaning implied in the maxim. The use of the notion "happy with his portion," which could be also translated as "happy with his share, or lot," emphasizes the principle that a man should have no more than a portion, a part of the whole. He must not aspire to own all. This position has obvious social implications, for it assumes that other people ought to have their share, too. Thus, the statement, though ostensibly directed at the individual, does not forget the society at large. The ambition of the individual ought to be balanced against the needs and rights of his fellow beings. The limitless quest for riches is implicitly seen as an asocial stance and is replaced by a position which allows everyone — at least, within a viable economy — to become rich by being content with his own portion. The balanced mind of the individual who refrains from greed, and the social needs, co-exist harmoniously and complement each other.

The critical attitude to the inordinate quest of riches can be found also in Plato. Thus, when theoretically describing the formation of the state, or organized society, he sees in the quest for luxury, which is tantamount to the quest of riches beyond the natural needs of man, the root of all evil. The commitment "to the unlimited accumulation of wealth" is the cause of war, as well as "almost all the evils in States, private as well as public."¹⁸ In a similar vein, when considering human predilection for wisdom, honour and gain, or money-making, the last is the lowest on the scale of values.¹⁹ The same sentiment is echoed by Aristotle, when he refers to "the necessities of life" as required both by the man who practices social virtues and by one who is dedicated to contemplation. Basic material conditions have to be satisfied, but the important objectives in life are on other planes — social involvement, and, above it, intellectual activity or contemplation.²⁰

The Greek philosophical approach to riches is the outcome of a wider perception of man, which regards the material endeavour in the context of overall human values. Man is a social and a spiritual being, though bound by physical-material conditions. To stress the latter at the expense of the former, while fairly common, upsets the true order of priorities. The approach of Ben Zoma to riches has also to be understood in the context of a more comprehensive outlook, which becomes clear when the scriptural support, adduced to justify and explain his position and his interpretation of it, is analyzed.

The scriptural support reads: "When thou eatest the labour of thy hands, happy shalt thou be and it shall be well with thee" (Psalm 128:2). The implication of this verse is that it is not merely the man who is happy

18. *The Republic*, Book II, 372–373.

19. *The Republic*, Book IX, 583.

20. *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, vii, 1178a.

with his portion who is rich and, therefore, happy, but that the riches have to be derived from the labour of the hands of a man to facilitate his happiness. Such a stand seems to be implicitly critical and disparaging of riches or possessions not gained by one's own labour, besides limiting the amount of riches (which can hardly be excessive if they are merely the product of the labour of the hands of an individual). This virtually sounds like an exhortation to productive work and a disparagement of gain by more sophisticated, let alone speculative, means.

Ben Zoma's interpretation of the verse from Psalms adds another dimension to his maxim, by placing it in the context of a wider religious outlook. In a characteristic Midrashic commentary, he attributes different intent and meaning to the poetical duplication of the verse. While the statements "happy shalt thou be" and "it shall be well with thee" are intended by the Psalmist as no more than the repetition of the same idea, Ben Zoma uses them to convey two different, though complementary, propositions. "Happy shalt thou be" is addressed to life in this world, comments the *tanna*, while "it shall be well with thee" conveys the promise of wellbeing in the world to come.

By relating the maxim of moderation in the quest for riches to the award of happiness in the world to come, Ben Zoma elevates the dictum to a new high level. It is no more only psychological advice with social implications; it becomes a maxim involving an absolute dimension, for it is related not merely to terrestrial affairs of a transient nature, at least as far as the virtuous individual is concerned. It touches the continuing, endless, immortal condition of the said individual, it verges on the absolute. The person who is happy with what he has, and does not devote his life to a never-ending quest for riches, is not only a happier person; he is also a better person as judged by an absolute scale of values.

Implicit in the promise of wellbeing in the world to come, for those who are happy with their lot and live by their own toil, is the notion that the quest for excessive riches distracts one from following the path which leads to eternity. This path, to judge by other rabbinical statements, is one of commitment to the study of the Torah, which leads to right and just conduct, the righteous life. Thus, Hillel, the venerated sage of an earlier age, says: "He who acquired the words of the Torah, acquired life of the world to come."²¹ Significantly, the traditional reading of *Pirke Avot* — one chapter each Sabbath during the spring and summer months — opens with a statement, prefixed to each of the six chapters: "Everyone of Israel has a portion in the world to come, for it is said, 'And thy people are all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever . . .'" (Isaiah 60:21). "Inherit the land for ever," in the rabbinical interpretation, means: "will live eternally in the world to come." Assuming that Ben Zoma is in accord with this fundamental philosophy, it can be inferred that he relegates the

21. *Pirke Avot*, 2:8.

material life and quest to what Aristotle called “the necessities of life,” while regarding the life of study, piety and righteousness, a life leading to eternity, as the desirable focus of Jewish existence.

The insistence on restraining the quest for material possessions, and the implicit warning against an exclusive commitment to an acquisitive life, has been echoed in European folklore, which tells stories about men who sold their souls for riches, or who succumbed to their own greed. The deviation from the right way or sensible self-restraint is often linked to the seductive influence of the devil. These folk tales have served as themes for some masterly literary compositions, such as the story of Lev Tolstoy, “How Much Land Does a Man Need?”²² or of Rudyard Kipling, “The King’s Ankus.”²³

5.

“Who is an honoured man? He who honours [other] people.” On the face of it, this is just a statement of a psychological or a sociological fact. He who respects other people is respected by them. Be nice to people, and people will be nice to you. Respect is enhanced by social reciprocity.

Yet, there is more to the statement than a mere common sense observation. It can also be understood as an indirect criticism of those who look for public admiration and honour in an active way, regarding public esteem as a worthwhile aim of personal endeavour. The seekers of honour who are mentioned by Plato and Aristotle come to mind. As already mentioned, neither philosopher disparaged such quest of honour, though both regarded it as inferior to the quest of wisdom or contemplative activity.²⁴ Ben Zoma, on the other hand, by ignoring the choice of a life dedicated to the pursuit of honour and public recognition, and suggesting, instead, respect for fellow human beings as a source of honour, seems deliberately to exclude the quest of public esteem from his list of desirable endeavours.

This, somewhat speculative, conclusion can be strengthened by relating Ben Zoma’s statement to another dictum in *Pirke Avot*, attributed to Rabbi Elazar Ha-Kappar: “Envy, lust and [pursuit of] honour take man out of the world.”²⁵ Here, besides lust, envy and the quest of honour are cited as vices, or, one is tempted to say, deadly sins. The exact nature of the consequences of these qualities is not quite clear, for “take man out of the world” can be interpreted in a variety of ways. It may mean the isolation and estrangement of the culprit, or his exclusion from the world of decent people, or his ultimate personal downfall, or even demise.

22. Included in Lev Tolstoy, *Russian Stories and Legends* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967).

23. Included in Rudyard Kipling, *The Second Jungle Book*, 1895.

24. See *The Republic*, Book IX, 583 and *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, vii, 1177b.

25. *Pirke Avot*, 4:25.

Whatever the nature of the plight, Rabbi Elazar is not primarily concerned about the dire consequences for the lustful, the envious, and the ambitious, but with the undesirable and the immoral nature of these propensities. The good man ought not to cater to his lust and ambition, nor be envious of his fellow beings.

Seen in this light, the statement that those are honoured who honour others appears as a criticism of those who seek prominence by putting themselves forward, who are primarily concerned with their own success, as ambitious people often are. Rather than thinking of one's own position in society, one should show respect to one's fellow citizens or fellow men, that is to say, express one's concern for the standing of others.

Perhaps implicit in this stance is the assumption that a society of competing seekers of honour promotes envy and friction among them, elements of discord and conflict. By contrast, a society in which each man respects other men promotes social harmony and peace. A man honouring others is honoured in return. Thus, if all honour each other, all are honoured, which is an ideal state for a community. Not so is the case of self-seekers. To be given distinction and unusual respect results in separating the recipient of such honour from others. This kind of honour must remain the privilege of the few, and cannot be subsumed under the rule of a universal principle applying to all men.

The rabbinical stance clearly expresses a strong concern for social morality. Ben Zoma's dictum, while in one sense expressing a factual statement, a common sense reflection on social relations — the honoured man is he who honours other people — in another way makes an ethical statement. This point can be further substantiated by the interpretation of the maxim itself. For the Hebrew word, *mekhubad*, can be translated as "honoured" as well as "honourable." Thus, the maxim could read: "Who is an honourable man? He who honours [other] people." A man who honours other people is honourable, he *deserves* to be honoured. He does not merely choose an *expedient* way for attaining honour for himself by respecting his fellow men. He takes the *right* path, and, thereby, deserves moral approval. He *ought* to be honoured.

The sayings of Ben Zoma, not unlike those of some of the other *tannaim*, while terse and seemingly simple, are open to interpretation and discussion. The elusive meaning of *mekhubad*, signifying both honoured and honourable — actually, respected and worthy of respect — is a case in point. The questionable meaning of hero, the elusive satisfaction of riches, the complex nature of wisdom, are all open to reflection and discussion. While Ben Zoma has his point of view, the formulation of his philosophy offers a stimulus to a dialogue and controversy. Whether or not this is intended by him and by some other sages, the argument resulting from the peculiar formulation of the maxim accords with the argumentative character and method of the *tannaim* and their subsequent Talmudic followers. Engaged in legal interpretation and adjudication, the discus-

sion, argument, and disputation were the very nature of their intellectual activity. Though their philosophical dicta seem to belong to a different category of thinking, these dicta express the thoughts of the same scholars, who, consciously or unwittingly, were disposed, or even eager, to provoke discussion and intellectual argument. For, besides being scholars, they were teachers, and, thus, as much aware of the pedagogical value of the dialogue as Socrates and Plato had been.

Ben Zoma could have conveyed his position by simply stating that wisdom has to be sought not only in books but also culled from ordinary people; that it is paramount to control one's evil impulse; that it is desirable to acquiesce in one's modest but adequate possessions, rather than pursue inordinate riches; that one ought to respect one's fellow beings. Instead, the *tanna* chose to append his value judgments to a series of controversial definitions of widely admired types and pursuits: wise, heroic, wealthy, and honored (or honorable). This method may well have served a pedagogical purpose. By offering his startling definitions, which contradict the common notions, Ben Zoma intrigues and provokes the scholars and the disciples, and compels the attention of his and future generations to reflect on the issues close to his heart. One may accept these controversial positions or reject them, but, once they are conveyed in his provocative definitions, his point of view and the issue itself cannot be ignored.

This system is reminiscent of the famed Socratic approach of stimulating people to think by asking them to define some basic, seemingly simple, concepts, and then, by questioning such definitions, compelling people to reflect on the issue and not merely to repeat current opinions. The definition is the pedagogical fulcrum in both cases. Yet, there is a difference between the Greek philosopher and the *tanna*, for the latter did not elaborate intricate dialogues, master-pieces of intellectual analysis (at least, we have no record of such), but simply stated his definition. Thus, the method of Ben Zoma seems diametrically opposed to that of Socrates: it provides the answer rather than demanding, provoking or stimulating it. Yet, it seems to us that this difference is of secondary importance. It is tactical rather than strategic. For Ben Zoma, by making his definition controversial, still propounded a stand which would encourage and provoke discussion and argument — starting with the sage's definition and going backward to its justification, or, possibly, its rejection.

Ostensibly, Ben Zoma presents us with four maxims, each to be considered separately and independently. He does not put forward a coherent philosophy, relating his notions of the wise man, the hero, the rich man, and the honoured one, to each other, as the Greek philosophers do when discussing the various ideals of life — the pursuit of wisdom, of honour, and of money. We do not know whether Ben Zoma preferred wisdom to self-control, and either of the two to moderation in material concerns, or the consideration for the dignity of one's fellow citizens. There

is no indication here of a scale of preference, or of the interdependence of the virtuous pursuits. Yet, it would be mistaken to conclude that the four dicta are not linked by an underlying philosophy. In fact, the examination of the statements and their scriptural support points to a clear and consistent outlook. The maxims, though each standing on its own merits, complement each other and form an intelligible and solid foundation for a way of life. What, then, is the philosophy of Ben Zoma, which can be deduced from his dicta and their justification?

A cardinal assumption of the *tanna* is that one's way of life has to be determined not only from the perspective of one's transient earthly existence — though this must not be ignored — but also *sub specie aeternitatis*. An individual's life is judged not merely by relative standards, but on an absolute scale. One's actions in this world are relevant for the world to come. This elevation of the significance of one's conduct, from the limitations of man's temporal existence to the range of the absolute, is reminiscent of the Socratic assertion about the pursuit of the right way irrespective and in defiance of the limitations of man's individual life span:

O men of Athens, . . . either acquit me or not; but whatever you do, understand that I shall never alter my ways, not even if I have to die many times.²⁶

The absolute value of moral pursuit transcends the vicissitudes of temporal existence. Ben Zoma and various other *tannaim* express a similar sentiment by extending the significance of the right conduct to its relevance in the world to come. For though, on the face of it, the world to come is an extension of existence which facilitates rewarding the just, it also provides the timeless support for the ethical imperatives and the Divine framework for human conduct. Man, in his limited earthly existence, is thus exhorted to see himself in a much wider perspective: his own deeds and way of life become linked to the system of an absolute and eternal Divine order.

In the wide framework of this order, man is exhorted to follow a life of self-control and self-restraint. The right way for man is not to give free vent to all of his impulses and desires. There are evil propensities in him, and it is his duty to subdue and control them. Lust, or inordinate pursuit of riches, or passionate quest of public honour, are all dangerous and destructive. The good man is he who controls these propensities, and chooses a life of moderation. This, broadly speaking, parallels the approach of Plato and Aristotle, who advocate moderation and inner harmony and the supremacy of reason in the life of the individual.

Yet, Ben Zoma is not concerned merely with the individual. For man is a member of the community; he is, as Aristotle put it, *zoon politikon*, a social or political creature. This does not mean that man ought to compete with his fellow human beings for riches, or for honour, or any other privilege. On the contrary, being a member of a community commands con-

26. Plato, *Apology*, 30.

sideration for other people. Do not look for your honour, but show respect to others. Do not look for inordinate riches, but be happy with your portion, so that others may enjoy theirs. Even in your quest for wisdom, which does not deprive or diminish such quest by other people, consider the insights of others. For though the community sets demands on the individual, it also reciprocates by offering benefits to him. He may get wiser by learning from other people, and he will be honoured by those he honours.

The consequence of these guidelines is a society which is saved from inner frictions. Individuals who control their evil drives, and who show consideration and respect to each other, form a community which is at peace with itself. In this sense, the good society is as much sought by Ben Zoma and other *tannaim*, as the ideal state was pursued by Plato. Yet, there is a profound difference between the Greek philosopher's model and the Jewish scholars' objective. Plato's republic is built on rigid class divisions and social hierarchy. Everybody must know his place in society, and obediently acquiesce in his designated position. The community, as envisaged by sages like Ben Zoma, essentially looks forward to a society of equals, in which everybody may be happy with his portion, in which everybody will be honoured, in which all have a part in wisdom, as well as a portion in the world to come. There may be actual differences in individual capabilities and accomplishments, but these should not obliterate the basic concern for every human being or the recognition of every man's importance and dignity. Unlike in the Platonic state, where each person fulfills a function in the body politic according to his class, and is accorded rights, or deprived of them, to fit the whole, Ben Zoma's philosophy clearly implies that everybody ought to have access to wisdom and knowledge, that everybody can and ought to be a "hero," that everybody can be truly rich (in his sense), and ought to be honoured.

Judaic injunctions have occasionally been described as rules of expediency rather than of morality. To address this accusation to the maxims of Ben Zoma, it could be said that he justifies moderation in riches by the consequent wellbeing in this and the coming world, that he exhorts each person to honour others in order to be honoured. It could even be argued that Ben Zoma implicitly suggests that it is beneficial for the wise to be so, and that the self-controlled person benefits from the strength of his character, though this may be a moot point. Be this as it may, even when the benefits to the agent resulting from his behavior are explicitly stated, this need not degrade the maxims to a non-ethical level.

It is true that rabbinical precepts, as well as Biblical injunctions, often relate the behavior of the individual, or the people, to his or its subsequent fortunes: right behavior is rewarded, while sin and evil-doing are punished. This, however, does not mean, nor is it intended to mean, that the *justification* of right conduct is in the salutary consequences for the agent involved. The reward is mentioned, when it is, to provide an incentive,

just as the punishment for evil-doing is pointed out to assure a deterrent. Yet, the right behaviour, whether in honouring one's father and mother (Exodus 20:12), or, in the case of Ben Zoma, in controlling one's greed and ambition, is right in itself. The Bible and the *tannaim* realized that many human beings may not have enough moral strength to abide by right for its own sake and, so, they resorted to the promise of reward and the threat of punishment to assure as wide a compliance as possible with the commandments or instruction offered.

This linkage is not alien to the Greek philosophers who, by and large, argue that the good man is also the truly happy man, or, as Aristotle put it, that "happiness is an activity in accordance with virtue."²⁷ Though the argument for the connection between the right and the expedient in Greek philosophy may follow its own distinctive path, and excludes the theological element so common in Judaic ethics, the trend to link virtue with happiness, the good deed with reward, the moral with the beneficial, is characteristic of both civilizations. The Greek philosophers may see virtuous behavior as leading to personal happiness, while the Jewish Sages see the good action rewarded in the coming world if not always in this one. Neither isolates and separates the moral deed and behavior from the beneficial consequences to the doer and agent.

27. *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, vii, 1177a.

Sinai and What Makes Us Jewish

ELLIOT B. GERTEL

IT IS ALWAYS INSPIRING AND EXCITING TO read the majestic narrative in Exodus 20 which tells of God's Revelation to the Israelites on Mount Sinai, entering into a Covenant with an entire people and stipulating laws to that people amidst thunder and lightning. The giving and receiving of those commandments is described as a cosmic event, merging nature and humanity, heaven and earth. The ancient Rabbis have many significant and meaningful legends about it and there is a substantial genre of Jewish humor about it as well. Much of that humor is actually quite serious and quite sarcastic and almost always involves a history lesson. Consider, for example, the experience of Benjamin Disraeli who, when he was appointed to high office in Britain, was the object of anti-Semitic diatribes in Parliament. Disraeli, ever the superb wit, answered his attackers by observing that when *his* ancestors, the Jews, received the Torah on Sinai, *their* ancestors were naked barbarians roving the Anglo-Saxon woodlands. A similar story is told of the Jew in America who was told by an old Yankee woman, who obviously regarded him as an outsider: "My ancestors came over on the Mayflower." The Jewish man, who rightfully felt as much of an American as she, responded: "My ancestors stood on Mount Sinai and received the Ten Commandments."

There is very little that is light-hearted about these jokes. They are jokes or witticisms of pain, of the pain of Jewish individuals who, responding to Gentile attempts to make them feel inferior, as well as to their own discomfort at being and feeling "different," return with the suggestion that Jews may even be a bit superior.

In the Sinai narrative, in fact, God tells the people: "Now, therefore, if ye will harken to My voice, indeed, and keep my Covenant, then ye shall be Mine own treasure from among all peoples; for all the earth is Mine; and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy people" (Exodus 19:5-6).

Does this concept of a priestly people, a holy people, mean that Jews must regard themselves as somehow better or superior to others? Note that God's "election" of the Israelites is contingent upon their accepting the Covenant and its commandments. There is no reason given for God's "choice." There is no accounting for taste, not even God's. The point is simply made in Scripture that God owns the world and, thus, can choose anyone for any purpose.

ELLIOT B. GERTEL is Rabbi of Congregation Rodfei Zedek, in Chicago, and is on the editorial boards of *Conservative Judaism* and *The Jewish Spectator*.

Yet, it does seem that some perspective on the role of Jews in the world and on the meaning of being Jewish is offered in the Covenant narrative in Exodus — not only *a* perspective, but *the* perspective.

With the frequent talk and argument about “Who is a Jew,” or “What is a Jew” — a perennial issue in Israel — and with all of our own questions about “Why be Jewish?” and the answers that each of us gives, not to mention all the debates as to which are the “authentic” answers, it is certainly worth considering the Biblical account of the Covenant, in order to assess some attitudes of Jews, both modern and ancient, on the meaning of Jewishness.

I.

We begin with the most negative possible (and happily, out of style) attitude of Jews — namely, Jewish self-hatred, a belief that Jews are, somehow, *inferior* to others. Self-hatred abounded when the ghetto walls collapsed in the last century and Jews emerged into the enlightened, Western world. They were objects of contempt even in so-called secularized society,¹ and were themselves embarrassed that they had not yet acquired the culture, art, sciences, or the manners of the Western World. Worse yet, many Jews were self-conscious about the commandments and holy deeds, the knowledge of sacred literature and of the spiritual dimension of life, in which their parents had excelled. Christianity seemed so much more cultured — assuming, of course, that one needed religion at all.

In 1945, Rabbi Milton Steinberg wrote a book, *A Partisan Guide to the Jewish Problem*, in order to confront precisely this kind of Jewish self-hatred which was so prevalent from the nineteenth century to well into the twentieth. In that volume, he described the diary of a Jewish woman in Germany, early in our century, who wrote of the “painful, hateful, deadly . . . consciousness of my [Jewish] descent” which she compared to leprosy and cancer! “As little as a dog or pig can cast off its dogishness or swinishness,” she wrote, so “little can I tear myself from the ties that bind me to that stage of existence that lies between man and beast — the Jews.” She added that, for murder or theft she could find forgiveness, but never for the “sin” and “curse” of Jewishness.²

Fortunately, that kind of self-hatred is not so prevalent today. Neither do we speak of a “Jewish problem,” for it is now recognized that the so-called “Jewish problem” is really the problem of anti-Semites or

1. On the contempt for Jews in so-called “Enlightened” circles, which merely translated into secular terms the old Christian prejudices, see Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1968).

2. Cited in Milton Steinberg, *A Partisan Guide to the Jewish Problem* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1945).

a psychological disorder in some Jews. We live in a time when ethnic pride is fashionable. We agree quite readily with Rabbi Steinberg when we read his protests, made in the 1930s and 1940s, that "the Jew who is a hollow shell, a Jewish Zero, a Hebraic cipher, a vacuum, is flooded inevitably with hostile notions about Jews. The anti-Semite convinces him." We agree with his observation that a "living Judaism" delivers the Jewish man or woman from being a worm, and provides self-respect.³ Through the achievements of the American Jewish community and the State of Israel, we have learned to be proud of Jewishness. But we are still in danger of hollow pride, which is no substitute for spiritual vision. For when spiritual vision is chauvinism, self-hatred can return. When the Ten Commandments are repeated in Deuteronomy, Moses tells the people that the Commandments are the wisdom of the Jewish People both in our eyes and in the eyes of other peoples (Deut. 4:6). The Biblical vision is that we Jews are not sustained by pride, but that we become a treasure among the nations, both to ourselves and to others, when we maintain a certain perspective on our relationship with God, the Covenant between us.

Covenant, in turn, provides a structure both of perspective and growth for the people, a structure for *teaching* the people as well as for *forviging* them.⁴ For if, as Solomon Schechter observed, it is not always easy to love the Jews, we learn to love fellow Jews, and, thereby, to love humanity, through the Covenant. One needs the Covenant, as well, in order to love God. It is the structure for arguing with God,⁵ for seeking Him.

II.

Indeed, the attitude of self-hatred is but the flipside posture of a second attitude of some Jews about the Jewish People — namely, that we are somehow better than others. When one reads the writings of Rabbi Meir Kahane, for example, one would conclude that Judaism has never learned from other peoples, that, the more Jews live in a vacuum, the more authentic and pure and uncontaminated their Judaism will be. There definitely has been an attitude in certain periods and in certain places that anything Gentile is impure, evil, and un-

3. Milton Steinberg, *A Believing Jew*, ed. Edith A. Steinberg (N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1951), pp. 128–9.

4. See Exodus 33:12–23 and Exodus 34:4–10 and the fine Hertz commentaries on these passages, as well as Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 143. Cf. also, Michael Wyschogrod's observation, "While sin is a reality, the eternal election of Israel is a greater reality," in Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: God in the People Israel* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), p. 213.

5. See Genesis 18:22–33 and, also, Levenson, chapter 12. See, also, Elliot B. Gertel, "Evil and Covenant," *Jewish Spectator*, Summer 1975.

Jewish, and that Gentiles are, somehow, less moral, less intelligent, less worthy than Jews. It may be true that, in ages past, our ancestors had reason to regard Gentiles as menacing and violent and as morally not as disciplined as they were themselves. That may have been true of certain cultures in which Jews found themselves, but there was never a doctrine in Judaism that, somehow, Jews were *born* with greater morality and intelligence. Indeed, the Torah makes the point over and over that the people must keep up their side of the Covenant by obeying God's commandments and trusting in God. In Hebrew, faith, *emunah*, means being faithful: both God and Israel must be faithful to the Covenant.

The Book of Deuteronomy insists on observing that, when the people of Israel received the commandments, they could not tolerate the Voice of God, and begged Moses to spare them from direct contact with His Voice (Deut. 18:15). An ancient midrash of our Sages says that the experience was so overwhelming that the people literally lost their souls, and God had to revive them.⁶ No people was equipped to face the Divine Charge. Another Rabbinic legend says that, when the Israelites came out of Egypt, they were broken-down, blemished, bruised, a sorry bunch after all the years of slavery, with every physical affliction. God had to heal them on the spot so that they would be up to what happened at Sinai (*Numbers Rabbah* 7:1). The implication is that they were not chosen because they were super people or in any way perfect specimens. Indeed, in Deuteronomy, Moses tells the people that it was because they were small and helpless that God found them an appropriate vehicle (Deut. 7:7), so that no one would believe that they were powerful and clever enough to develop an advanced culture on their own which might be ascribed to them instead of to God.

As for Gentiles, our tradition maintained that, through the Covenant that God made with Noah, they were expected to lead moral lives and to shun idolatry, and that all who lived decent lives would have salvation and Divine support.⁷ There is no competition between Jews and Gentiles to see who is more moral. The role of Israel was to point the way, but not to corner the market on morality and wisdom. Indeed, the Torah reading in which the Ten Commandments appear is named after Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, who is described as pious and God-fearing and who, though he was not Jewish, had much to teach to Moses (Exodus 18). The Torah itself teaches us that Jews have much to learn from Gentiles, even though Jews hold special perspectives and teachings in trust for all the world. The wisdom of the Gentiles

6. *Pesikta Rabbati* 20:4.

7. See David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: An Historical and Constructive Study of the Noahide Laws* (N.Y. and Toronto, 1983). Novak summarizes some of his conclusions in *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification* (N.Y. and Oxford University Press, 1989), chapter 1.

has always enhanced Jewish thought and culture. There is even a special blessing to be recited by the Jew when he meets a wise person of any background. If Jews, as a people, have developed special qualities of learning, compassion, and moral perspective over the centuries, it is only because of the Covenant with God. The moment we leave the orbit of our spiritual resources, we are in danger of falling into hollow chauvinism that is but a step away from self-hatred. If we lose the spiritual resources of that Covenant, we distance ourselves from values and qualities that our ancestors had no choice but to cultivate. As Professor Eliezer Berkovits observed, in describing what he considers an *orthodox* view of "choseness:" "God never chose the Jews; but any people whom God chose was bound to become the Jewish People."⁸

III.

If some Jews in the modern Western experience have vacillated between inferiority complexes and delusions of grandeur, it has not been entirely their fault. Perhaps the fault is much less theirs than they imagine. Christianity has had much to do with it because of the unhealthy attitude of the early Christians, especially Paul, who were Jews, and had decided that Jews are *both* inferior and superior to Gentiles. This strange juxtaposition of opposites, this grotesque ambivalence toward Jews with which Jews have had to live and cope for some 2,000 years, is the result of Paul's desire to remain Jewish and, yet, to replace the Covenant at Sinai which established the Jewish People as a people.

Paul decided that salvation could come only the way cults in his native Tarsus and throughout the world had regarded salvation as coming — through a savior who dies and rises to bring people close to a distant deity.⁹ The Jews had never had a problem with God being close to all human beings who call upon Him (see Psalm 145); Jews never regarded God as far away. Yet, the Greek mind, which penetrated Tarsus, believed it undignified for a god to be too close, and felt most comfortable with salvation and mystery cults to reach the highest deities through other beings. Obsessed with the Greek notion that human beings were incapable of pleasing the gods without any special favor; weighted down with a sense of original sin, a Greek notion rather than a Biblical one, that human beings were totally depraved from birth; convinced that the commandments were too lofty to be fulfilled by human beings even though the Hebrew Bible had explicitly said that the commandments were very near to the people, who must observe them as best as their ability allows (Deut. 30:11–14); Paul and the early Chris-

8. Eliezer Berkovits, *God, Man and History: A Jewish Interpretation* (N.Y.: Jonathan David, 1959), p. 142.

9. See Charles Guignebert, *The Early History of Christianity* (N.Y.: Twayne Publishers, reissue of 1927 translation), pp. 71 ff., and, especially, pp. 74–77.

tians, who were all of Jewish background, decided that God had given the Torah on Sinai not to provide a way to the good life and salvation, but to show that people had to get their salvation another way, through another covenant (Romans 5:20, Galatians 3:10–12). Paul went so far as to say that if the Ten Commandments had not said, “Thou shalt not covet,” people could not covet (Romans 7:7–8). The Law makes them sin so that they realize they can find salvation only in a savior who frees them from their sins and from the laws! Thus, Paul would be saying, in more contemporary terms, that if there were no speed limits, people would not be tempted to speed!

Torn between a chauvinistic feeling of Jewish superiority and an uncontrollable rage against his fellow Jews for resisting his notion of salvation because of their loyalty to the Covenant at Sinai, Paul decided that he would turn to the Gentiles and save them in order to make the Jews “jealous” (Romans 11:13–16). He came to insist that the Jews would always be “chosen” in the sense that their existence would bring salvation to the Gentiles, even though the Jews themselves would be “cursed” until they found “salvation” and, thereby, reached their potential of being better, more desirable, Christians than the Gentile Christians (See Romans 9). Is this not a chauvinistic distortion of the Jewish concept of “chosenness,” a distortion insulting to *both* Jews and Gentiles alike?

Paul knew exactly which buttons to push, using Rabbinic methods of Bible interpretation (*midrash*) to read his own agenda into the Hebrew Bible. And when the so-called “Messianic Jews” or “Jews for Jesus” of today assert that they accept only a “Jewish” savior, and that Jews make the best Evangelical Christians, one shudders at every echo of Paul. One shudders not only at the chauvinism which does violence to the Covenant at Sinai, but, also, at the historical fact that many Christians down through the centuries, often incited to violence by priests and bishops and so-called “reformers,” did not have any patience for the fine points of theology and for the clever hermeneutics in which Paul couched his program for the replacement of the Sinai Covenant.

Paul believed that he had support in the Biblical concept that the Jews would be God’s “treasure” (Exodus 19:5) only if they accepted the commandments. If you believe that the commandments are inadequate or replaced, then the Jews are replaced, or at least are a special people for reasons which they are the last to understand. They are, therefore, both superior and inferior, a special “race,” but too stubborn to understand why, because they are bogged down in an “old covenant.”

The problem with Paul’s concept of God and of the Jewish People, and with his very concept of original sin, is that it is unfair. It is not fair that God would create imperfect beings and then damn them for being imperfect unless they all accepted one specific savior about whom

most of humanity had no way of hearing, let alone knowing about.¹⁰ It is not fair that God would reveal Himself to the Jewish People at Sinai and give them teachings and laws, only to change the rules of the game at a later point because of certain things that Paul felt and believed. It is not fair to use words in the Hebrew Bible like “faith,” “salvation” and “sin” and give them a whole new meaning in Greek.

The Hebrew word for faith, *emunah*, means “faithfulness” in obedience to the Covenant. It means that we can trust God to be fair to us, to show us love and mercy and salvation if we do our best to follow His *mizvot*, or commandments, and that God should be able to trust us to be faithful to Him. Yet, because God is fair, He understands the weakness of human beings, including the Jewish People. The whole point of the story of the Golden Calf in the Bible is to show that when God was new to the Covenant, even God had to learn that the People of the covenant could fail, and that to destroy that people in anger or to back out of the Covenant or to make a new covenant would have been, as it were, a Divine embarrassment before the world, for it would have told the world that God is incapable of being faithful when the going gets tough (see Exodus 32:12).

Paul conveniently ignored the teaching of the Hebrew Prophets that, because God is God, God’s responsibility to be faithful to the Covenant is even greater than the responsibility of the Jewish People, for human being are frail and prone to test even God constantly, and, therefore, are liable to Divine chastisements. Yet, God would preserve a “faithful remnant” of the People Israel to remind the world that God’s Covenant is eternal because God is Eternal (See Isaiah 4:3, 7:6, 10:20–21, and Jeremiah 31:7).¹¹ If God were to change the rules of the Covenant, if God were to cause the Jewish People to regard themselves as somehow “racially” privileged, but damned as a people, *because* of their loyalty to the Covenant at Sinai, then God would be grossly unfaithful to the Covenant.

Our ancient Sages observed that when the Torah speaks of additional sacrifices for most major festivals, a sin offering is included. But, in connection with *Shavuot* (Pentecost), which commemorates the Giving and Receiving of the Torah on Sinai, no sin offering is mentioned (*Song*

10. See George Foote Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), vol. I, p. 495: “Paul’s definition of righteousness as perfect conformity to the law of God would never had been conceded by a Jewish opponent, to whom it would have been equivalent to admitting that God had mocked man by offering to him salvation on terms they both knew to be impossible — God, because he had made man a creature of the dust with all his human frailties (Psalm 103, 14) and implanted in him the ‘evil impulse’; man, above all the conscientious man, through his daily experience. God was too good, too reasonable, to demand a perfection of which he had created man incapable.” On salvation in Judaism, see, also, vol. II, p. 94.

11. On the “remnant of Israel,” see John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Phil.: Westminster Press, 1972), p. 289 ff.

of *Songs Rabbah* 4:4). Could this not be their way of saying that, if individuals like Paul become too obsessed with human sin and imperfection, they fall into the danger of forgetting the message of the Sinai Covenant that human beings *are* capable of following God's commandments? The teaching of Judaism is that God multiplied commandments for the Jewish People in order to show human beings that they can do more than they believe themselves capable of doing, and that God offers them inspiration and encouragement and salvation — or grace, if you will — just for doing their best to live decent and righteous lives.

IV.

If the Jews are not inferior to others and are not superior to others, and if Christianity would have us vacillate between the two extremes, how do we explain Jewish uniqueness? How do we explain the miracle of our survival, and of our remarkable deeds and thoughts, and of our return to our Homeland? A fourth attitude on the part of many Jews is simply that Jews are like everyone else, only more so. Some Jews say: "Jews *are*. Period. And the best way to explain it is simply to explain why other peoples exist."

Mordecai Kaplan founded Reconstructionist Judaism in the 1920s because he felt that Jews should be proud of their heritage but should not regard themselves as too special or as supernaturally chosen. To him, their heritage was a civilization like all others, which grew out of a cosmic impulse or Power that drives all civilizations to survive and, it is hoped, to work for a better world. The ways of Jewish civilization, Kaplan said, are no longer to be regarded as Divine commandments, but as folkways, similar to folkways in other civilizations, but, in the case of Jews, especially insightful folkways, religiously speaking, for the "evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people" has simply "pioneered" in demonstrating the human potential to muster a "collective religious experience" and, thereby, to motivate people and nations to achieve "ethical nationhood" or "international cooperation."¹² In other words, Jews are like everyone else, only a little faster — in the religious realm.

In the 19th century, the father of German Reform Judaism, Abraham Geiger, said that Jews had a special "genius" for religion, just like other peoples have special talents.¹³ Of course, the Prophets did not see that special genius when the people rebelled against God and fell into idolatry, but maybe the Israelites did not use their genius as carefully in the seventh century B.C.E. as they did in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, however, we are offered a new theory for

12. See Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood* (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1970).

13. In Max Wiener, *Abraham Geiger and Liberal Judaism: The Challenge of the Nineteenth Century* (Phil.: Jewish Publication Society, 1962), "Revelation," pp. 179–82.

Jewish uniqueness. "Humanist Judaism" has become a "movement," with Rabbi Sherwin Wine in Detroit, and has now found roots in a few other places. The Jews, we are told, are special because they are skilled at humanism. As one self-avowed "humanist" rabbi put it, Jews do not need to believe in God to remain Jews because Jewish religion, culture and history have already made Jews different, "not in their genes but in their history," giving Jews a unique "striving to achieve a moral posture in an immoral world."¹⁴ Is one humanism or history more spiritual than another? It is one thing to believe that God can call different people in different ways for mysterious purposes. It is quite another to believe that your humanism is somehow a more spiritual or more moral striving than other humanisms when you don't believe in a God Who does the calling.

If we say that Jews are like everyone else, only more so, we really end up saying, "My ethical nationhood is more advanced than yours; I have religious genius and you don't; my humanism is better than your humanism." The Psalmist showed far more perspective when he observed, "Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but unto Thy Name give glory" (Psalm 115). The great moments of our people, moments inspired by Sinai, were when we realized that there was a greater Wisdom working *through* us, but not *because* of us. Our Sages taught that the Torah was given at Sinai because Sinai was the most humble of places, because it was not in any one land and no one people could claim to own it.¹⁵ Wasn't that their way of saying that part of the responsibility for being the Jewish People is to acknowledge that there is more to our experience than we can understand or claim credit for?

V.

There is yet a final attitude of some Jews which must be considered, and which is widely and emotionally held. Though not usually verbalized, at least in much detail, it was articulated quite cleverly by Philip

14. Rober E. Goldberg, "Comment," *Working Papers*, May-June 1983, p. 4. Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine, the major apostle of "Humanistic Judaism," observes in his small book by that title, *Humanistic Judaism* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1978) that the Jews are the "best adapted of modern peoples to life in urban civilization" (p. 13). Jews are best off as humanists, without the complication of theology, he says, because Jewish identity is "non-ideological and familial;" it is tribal memories. Since the Jewish family will exist as long as tribal memories exist and, more significantly, as long as external hostility to Jews persists (p. 62), Jews might as well affirm their role as the "vanguard of a humanistic outlook on life" (p. 89), as the first people to be "successfully urbanized" (p. 101) and the best at it, and as the harbingers of "internationality" and cosmopolitan culture (p. 94). It is hard to believe that Wine can seriously assert, and simultaneously, that Jews are *both* tribe/family and the best cosmopolitans! And, historically speaking, his view that Jews were the *first* successfully urbanized people is chauvinistic and laughable.

15. On the Sinai legends, see Philip Goodman, *The Shavuot Anthology* (Phil.: Jewish Publication Society, 1974), pp. 30-33, 38-9.

Roth in a recent memoir, *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography*. Here, Roth argues simply that, when it comes to being Jewish, no one else matters. Jewishness is just something you are and something you experience, no more and no less. It is not a matter of being inferior or superior or both or only more so. It is just a birthmark, pure and simple.

In this memoir, Roth waxes nostalgic about his Jewish childhood in Newark, New Jersey, the highlight of which was a “nervous forcefulness decidedly *irrepressible*” that “pulsated through our daily life” *despite* “all our taboos and prohibitions and our vaunted self denial.”¹⁶ For Roth, then, one is a Jew whether Jews have the commandments or not, and part of being a Jew, he further suggests, is knowing how to get around the commandments, or at least not to be stifled by them.¹⁷ As long as you are a *proud* Jew, as long as your parents are still proud of you, or at least like you, and you were “circumcised and *bar mitzvahed*” (*sic*), you are a good Jew no matter what you write about Jews or about the commandments.

Judaism, to Roth, is a nostalgic family bond that is impervious to the divorce rate or to wife-beating or other problems in modern society. As he puts it, “the Jewish family was an inviolate haven against every form of menace, from personal isolation to gentile hostility. Regardless of internal friction and strife, it was assumed to be an indissoluble consolidation. *Hear, O Israel, the family is God, the family is one.*”¹⁸ In making the idealized Jewish family of his childhood his God, Roth conveniently ignores that the values of the traditional Jewish family were believed to be based on God’s commandments, that the Jewish family was built on religious foundations, that Judaism itself provided commandments and a religious perspective even for the heartbreak of divorce.

Roth goes even further. He defines Judaism not only as nostalgia and not only as a given, but as a kind of *nachas*-system. As long as you are really proud of being Jewish, which Roth regards as pride in your parents, and as long as your parents are really proud of you, then it doesn’t matter what you have written about the Jews or how you have written it, for you are still a good Jew and no one can take that away from you.

He recalls that his parents had been proud of his stories even when the Anti-Defamation League got upset with him, for, after all, his parents *had* seen him “circumcised and bar mitzvahed,” had sent him for three years to “one of our neighborhood’s humble Hebrew Schools,” and all his closest friends *had* been Jewish boys. “About being Jewish,” Roth posits,

there was nothing more to say than there was about having two arms

16. Philip Roth, *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (N.Y.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), p. 122.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 121–2.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

and two legs. It would have seemed to us strange *not* to be Jewish — stranger still, to hear someone announce that he wished he weren't a Jew or that he intended not to be in the future.¹⁹

Roth tells us that he felt very Jewish, except that whereas his "Orthodox" grandfather found solace in "the familiar leathery odor of the flesh-worn straps of the old phylacteries in which he wrapped himself each morning," the little Philip Roth found that same solace in the smell of his baseball mitt.²⁰ And now the "mature" Philip Roth finds solace in the concept, "Once a Jew, always a Jew."

And, so, we come the full circle in attitudes of Jews about Judaism. Philip Roth has decided that being Jewish has nothing to do with Gentiles, but he still comes up with the same hollow pride of Jews who believe that they are superior to, (or perhaps, just different from) others, yet often with rhetoric similar to those who see Jews as vulgar and inferior, even though we now know (actually, I think, we always knew) that he never regarded Jews as inferior. Roth even gives sermons in his memoirs about how Jewish fraternities offered only ethnic support but did not keep the dietary laws that he knew as a child. The purpose of the sermons, however, is not to show that Jews should respect the commandments, but to show that Jews will be Jews, with or without the commandments.

The implication of the perverse credo, Jews will be Jews, with or without the commandments, is the vulgar notion that the commandments do not make or define the Jews, that only birth does. The monstrous outgrowth of Philip Roth's definition of Jewishness is his attitude toward the conversion to Judaism of one of his wives — and toward conversion in general.

To me, being a Jew had to do with a real historical predicament into which you were born and not with some identity you choose to don after reading a dozen books. I could as easily have turned into a subject of the Crown by presenting my master's degree in English literature to Winston Churchill as my new wife could become a Jew by studying with [Rabbi] Jack Cohen, sensible and dedicated as he was, for the rest of her life.²¹

And, so, Philip Roth, who is testing out a "nice Jewish boy" voice in the literary world, announces that he is making *teshuvah* (becoming penitent) not, God forbid, by affirming the Covenant or the commandments, but by exposing Gentile anti-Semitism and romanticizing the Jewish home, by finding cultural moorings in a childhood in which his only friends were Jews, and by violently opposing the very idea of conversion to Judaism. Most disturbing about Roth's notion that being a Jew is simply a matter of being born a Jew, is that too many

19. Ibid., p. 31.

20. Ibid., p. 32.

21. Ibid., p. 126. On Roth's disapproval of Gentile women disguising or renouncing "gentileness," see p. 137.

“ethnic” American Jews take refuge in at least some of Roth’s smug notions when it suits them.

VI.

When we read in the Torah of the Giving and Receiving of the Commandments at Sinai, and reaffirm that Covenant on *Shavuot*, we stand at Sinai with generations past and generations yet unborn (Deut. 29:13–14). We experience the awe of encountering the God of the Covenant, and bear witness to the event at Sinai which, in the words of Abraham Heschel, is “like no other event in the history of man.”²² To understand its significance, the true meaning of the commandments and the very meaning of inferior or superior, we have to get beyond our attitudes that Jews are inferior or superior, like everyone else or more so, or simply Jews by birth or ethnic stamp. We must stop vacillating among chauvinism, inferiority complexes, and ethnic nostalgia, and understand the true meaning of Sinai.

The meaning of Sinai was articulated well by the Jewish theologian, Rabbi Eugene Borowitz:

What finally makes Jewish life unique for people such as me is that . . . we remain involved with God as individuals and as a people. Were we consciously to face up to our relationship with God and live by it, the uniqueness of our way of life would become far more manifest.²³

Borowitz offers an authentic theology of Covenant which enables us, as Jews, to avoid the various pitfalls of “Jewishness” without a sense of Covenant. But there is a dimension of authentic Judaism which must be stressed as much as a Jew’s relationship with God, and that is, simply, the sense of physical belonging to the People of the Covenant. This other crucial dimension of Jewish spirituality, and of healthy perspective on Jewishness, is what Michael Wyschogrod has called the “theology of the Jewish body.”²⁴ Wyschogrod notes that Judaism is “the election of a biological people rather than, as in Christianity, of a community of faith,” which thus “puts into service of the redemptive plan both soul and body of the elected people,” even when the people do not understand or operate in consciousness of their mission.²⁵

Though it must be emphasized again that Jews who practice authentic Judaism have never regarded themselves as a race or closed order, Wyschogrod’s affirmation that the foundation of Judaism is the “family identity of the Jewish people” serves as a compelling and important corrective to any theology which would neglect the “family”

22. Abraham J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (N.Y.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955), p. 189.

23. Eugene Borowitz, *Reform Judaism Today. Book Three: How We Live* (N.Y.: Behrman House, 1978), p. 147.

24. Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith*, p. 28.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

aspect of Jewishness. But this has never presented theological obstacles to conversion to Judaism, even to as strong a believer of Jews as a biological family as Yehudah Halevi.²⁶

Indeed, Jewish openness to conversion, which has persisted since Biblical times, and with various degrees of ambivalence determined by social, historical and philosophical vicissitudes, has enabled Judaism to transcend chauvinism and isolationism on the one hand, and syncretism and assimilation on the other. In fact, the paradox and beauty of the centrality of peoplehood to a healthy Jewish sense of Covenant is best articulated in the Bible in Ruth's words to Naomi:

Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may the Lord do to me if anything but death parts me from you (Ruth 1:16–17).²⁷

It is precisely because Judaism is transmitted through a physical people that the people must welcome, through *halakhah*, those who will become part of it and part of that transmission. Halakhah, or religious law (practice), has authority both in Divine revelation and in the expression of the Covenantal relationship with God in which individual and community are involved.²⁸

Wyschogrod is on solid ground, theologically and historically speak-

26. *The Kuzari* (New York: Schocken, 1964). Wyschogrod goes a bit far when he describes the People Israel as the sacrament to replace sacrifices (*Op. Cit.*, p. 25) — as much a misreading of the Biblical theology of sacrifices (best described by Jacob Millgrom) as Christian polemics. Likewise, when he describes the Jewish People as the “incarnation of Torah” (p. 211). It seems that he enjoys the shock value of using Christian terminology. One finds other extremes, sweeping observations, such as the assertion that no theology per se is possible in Judaism because of the element of Jewish “incarnation,” but that “Jewish thought” is possible (pp. 173 ff.). Yet, Wyschogrod feels perfectly comfortable making the sweeping observation that the “whole philosophic enterprise” takes its cue from Jewishness (p. 159). Perhaps his most provocative point, however, is that Jewish existence takes precedence over the ethical (p. 223).

It is surprising that Wyschogrod never invokes or even mentions Yehudah Halevi's concept that Jews possess a “special seed” to insure the continuity and authenticity of Torah-interpretation (*Kuzari* I, secs. 94 ff.). While moderns cringe at “biological” and “genetic” theories — and rightly so — Halevi did not present a racist theory here, but an innocent medieval effort to account for authority and continuity in the interpretation of Jewish Law despite changing historical circumstances. If anything, it was an intuitive effort at circumscribing the problems of historicism and theology of history at a time which approached philosophical and theological problems from “natural” rather than “historical” angles. Besides, as Julius Guttman notes in *Philosophies of Judaism*, David W. Silverman tr. (N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1973), pp. 143–3, Halevi ascribes to Jews no special intellectual or moral powers, only the gift of “religious disposition” — something, we might add, which Abraham Geiger did centuries later. See also, Lippman Bodoff, “Was Yehudah Halevi Racist,” *JUDAISM* 38, No. 2 (Spring 1989): 174–184.

27. New Jewish Publication Society translation.

28. See David Hartman, *A Living Covenant: The Innovative Spirit in Traditional Judaism* (N.Y.: The Free Press-Macmillan, 1985), p. 200.

ing, when he observes that whatever else is added to the family identity of the Jewish People must be seen as

growing out of and related to the basic identity of the Jewish people as the seed of Abraham elected by God through descent from Abraham. This is the crux of the mystery of Israel's election. Seen through the eyes of man, a divine election of a group defined by some ideological criterion would have been far more plausible. It would have been far more understandable had God elected all those who feed the hungry and clothe the naked or, if our sensibilities are more contemplative than active, all those who have grasped the Absolute or achieved Nirvana . . . But being born into a particular family is hardly an achievement for which anyone deserves either credit or blame . . . And yet, in spite of all this . . . the God of Abraham chose this people as his vehicle in history . . . While God remains Absolute, as the God of history made known to man in revelation, he has made himself a partner in the fate of the Jewish people, whose vicissitudes do not leave him unaffected. Jewish theology can therefore be God-centered, but it must also be Israel-centered because if God is thought about in isolation from the people of Israel, the grave risk arises that the God so conceived is not the true God, namely, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.²⁹

Wyschogrod presents the inescapable theological bottom line in his conclusion that, being a Jew means that we who have been born Jewish or who have embraced Judaism have never really "earned" it, and must realize that we Jews, especially, "cannot sit in judgment over God" in trying to understand this "carnal election that is transmitted through the body" before and beyond the spirit.³⁰ His conclusion rings true, though it must be guarded from unhealthy distortion. And the only way so to guard the integrity and the privilege and obligation of being a Jew is to affirm, in the felicitous phrasing of Arthur Hertzberg, that the Jewish faith "is of lasting importance, and it is an ultimate sin to abandon it, *only* if it be conceived as divinely ordained; else what men have made they can unmake and the communities into which they are born are mere accidents."³¹

29. Wyschogrod, p. 57. See his observations regarding God's dwelling in and among the Jewish People, p. 103. Actually, he qualifies his statements by observing that the Jewish People is not to be deified or regarded as an incarnation in the Christian sense (p. 212).

30. Ibid., p. 176.

31. Arthur Hertzberg, *Being Jewish in America* (N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1979), pp. 22-3. The essay is reprinted from Milton Himmelfarb, ed., *The Condition of Jewish Belief* (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1966). See also the essays in the Himmelfarb volume by Seymour Siegel and Eugene Borowitz. The best essay to date on the "chosen people" concept is that by Arthur Hertzberg, "On Jewish Chosenness," in *Jewish Heritage Reader*, ed. Morris Adler and Lily Edelman (N.Y.: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1965). See, as well, S. Daniel Breslauer, *Covenant and Community in Modern Judaism* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1989), and Arnold M. Eisen, *The Chosen People in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).

Moses and Jesus: The Birth of the Savior

ALLAN KENSKY

THE ACCOUNT OF THE BIRTH OF MOSES IN the Book of Exodus is extremely brief. In the space of the first three short verses in Chapter 2 we read that a man of the house of Levi takes a daughter of Levi, who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son. The boy is hidden for three months and is then sent down the river. Other details, such as the parents' names and the existence of other siblings, are omitted as the text focuses all dramatic attention on the birth of the child and his subsequent well-being. We first hear that the child has an older sister when we read in verse 4 that she stood by watching as he floated down the river. We are told the names of Moses' parents in Chapter 6 verse 20, after God reveals Himself to Moses and appoints him messenger to deliver the Israelites from Egypt.

Even in the terse Biblical account, there are wondrous aspects to Moses' birth and infancy. When he was born he was seen by his mother as a goodly child, *ki tov*, a usage which echoes the *ki tov* spoken by God at the Creation of the universe. Further, Moses escaped the fate of the other male children. The Midrash embellishes the wondrous aspects of the story. Legends about the birth of Moses are found in the Babylonian Talmud and the later Midrashic collections, including *Exodus Rabbah*, *Midrash ha-Gadol*, *Yalkut Shimoni*, and *Sefer ha-Yashar*. Parallels to much of the material are found in Josephus, pointing to the antiquity of many of the legends.

Through the picture that the rabbis created, the greatness of Moses can already be detected in his infancy; it can also be seen in the special circumstances of his birth. As has been noted, similar stories about prophets and great teachers are found in other religions: the birth of the prophet or teacher is attended with signs and miracles; frequently the child overcomes early dangers to his life. He shows surprising knowledge in his youth.¹

The Midrash connects the birth of Moses with the decrees of Pharaoh, or, rather, it connects the decrees of Pharaoh with the prediction of the coming birth of the Hebrew savior. Of this prediction there are

1. H.W. Obbink, "On the Legends of Moses; in the Haggadah," *Studia Biblica et Semitica T.C. Vriezen Dedicata*, ed. W.C. van Unnick and A.S. vander Woude (Wageningen, 1966), p. 252.

ALLAN KENSKY is Associate Dean of the Rabbinical School of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

several versions. According to the Jerusalem *Targum* (on Exodus 1:15), Pharaoh had a dream in which he dreamt that all of Egypt was on one scale and a young goat was on the other. The latter outweighed the former. This dream was interpreted to Pharaoh to mean that an Israelite child would be born who would destroy all of Egypt. Josephus relates that the announcement to Pharaoh of the birth of this child is made by one of the sacred scribes (*Antiquities* II, 1. 205); in *Exodus Rabbah* (I, 22), Pharaoh is informed of the impending birth of a redeemer by his astrologers. In response to this announcement, Pharaoh issues a decree to the entire nation, or, alternatively, only to the Israelites, to cast their male-children into the river (B. *Sotah* 12a, *Exodus Rabbah* I, 18; cf. Ex. 1:22).

At this point, according to a tradition of Tannaitic provenance, Amram, one of the leaders of his generation, divorces his wife, Yokheved, reasoning that it is useless to chance having children if all male-children are to be killed. Other Israelite men follow Amram's course of action, but his daughter, Miriam, rises to reproach her father. "Father," she says, "your decree is worse than that of Pharaoh — Pharaoh has decreed only against the male-children, but you decree against both males and females . . ." In response to this reproach, Amram retakes his wife.

The concept of a remarriage of Amram and Yokheved helps explain the presence of an older sister in the birth story. At the same time it explains why the birth of Moses is presented as if it were the birth of a first child. The reason is that Moses is the first child born after the remarriage of his parents.

The ceremony of remarriage in which Amram retook Yokheved was no ordinary one. According to Rabbi Judah ben Zevina in the Babylonian Talmud (*Sotah* 12a), Amram placed Yokheved in a palanquin. Aaron and Miriam danced before her, while ministering angels sang a verse from Psalm 113, "The mother of the children is happy."

It is worth noting several rabbinic traditions regarding Amram and Yokheved. Both are considered righteous. Amram is one of four people who died, not on account of his own sins, but because of the decree directed against all humankind (B. *Baba Batra* 17a). He is one of seven people who helped bring the Shekhinah closer to earth (*Song of Songs Rabbah* 5,1). Yokheved, mother of Moses, is called by that name, meaning God is glorious, because her face reflected the Divine glory (*Midrash ha-Gadol* on Ex. 2:1).

Extraordinary things happened to Yokheved at that time. The rabbis took *bat Levi*, daughter of Levi, literally. If Yokheved was the daughter of Levi, she would have been 130 years old at the time of her remarriage, having been born upon the entry of the Israelites into Egypt. So why is she called daughter, signifying a young woman? Because, according to Rabbi Judah ben Zabida (or Zevina), signs of youth were

reborn in her: her flesh became smooth, her wrinkles straightened out, and her beauty was restored (B. *Baba Batra* 120a). Both the conception and childbirth of Moses were painless, for Yokheved was excluded from the decree placed on Eve (*Sotah* 12a, cf. Josephus *Antiquities* II, 1.220) — according to a gloss, by virtue of her righteousness.

Moses' role as savior (*mashiah*) is predicted before he is born. In Josephus, Amram is told by God in a dream that the child to be born "will deliver the Hebrew race from their bondage in Egypt" (*Antiquities* II, 212, 215–216). This tradition is elsewhere ascribed to Miriam (and according to the Midrash this is the reason why she is called Miriam the prophet at the Song of the Sea). Miriam prophesies: "My mother will give birth to a son who will save Israel" (*sheyoshia et Yisrael*).

When Moses is born, he is immediately recognized as special. As was noted, his mother sees that he is a goodly child (*ki tov*). Various interpretations are offered: that his parents recognized that he was fit for prophecy, that he was born circumcised, and, according to the sages, that the entire house was filled with light when he was born (*Sotah* 12a), for the phrase *ki tov* alludes to an earlier usage during creation: "And God saw the light and it was good." According to Rabbi Nathaniel, in the *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* (ch. 48), the form of the newborn child was as an angel of the Lord. Rabbi Jose ben Haninah relates that when Pharaoh's daughter opened the ark which contained the infant Moses, she saw the Shekhinah with him (*Sotah* 12b).

The similarities between the birth stories of Moses and Jesus are striking. Obvious parallels exist between the New Testament stories and the tale in Exodus:²

1. In Matt. 2:13–14, Herod was going to search for the child to destroy him, so Joseph took the child and his mother and went away. In Exodus 2:15, Pharaoh sought to do away with Moses, so Moses went away.

2. Herod's massacre of the boys in Bethlehem parallels Pharaoh's command to throw the Hebrew children into the Nile.

3. In Matt 2:19, Herod dies; in Ex 2:23, the king of Egypt dies.

4. In Matt 2:19–20, the angel of the Lord says to Joseph in Egypt, "Go back to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." The language is similar to Ex. 4:19, "The Lord said to Moses in Midian, 'Return to Egypt, for those who were seeking your life are dead.'"

The Midrashic tales of Moses offer additional parallels between the birth of Jesus and that of Moses:

1. The impending birth of each is announced to Herod and Pharaoh respectively, and both monarchs are filled with dread at the news.

2. Amram is told that his wife will give birth to a son who will save Israel; Joseph is told that Mary's son will be called Jesus "for he

2. Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, 1979), pp. 112–116.

will save the people from their sins.” (It should be noted that “from their sins” may be a later gloss.)³

3. The birth of Jesus is heralded by a star; at the birth of Moses there is great light.

4. From the start, both children are recognized as extraordinary.

5. Joseph espouses Mary while she is pregnant. This has an interesting parallel in a cryptic statement found in the Talmud that Amram married — or rather remarried — Yokheved while she was already pregnant. We will return to this statement later.

According to the late French midrashist, Renée Bloch, the parallels between Matthew’s account of the birth of Jesus and the Midrashic traditions about the birth of Moses are not accidental, for “the author of Matthew had in mind constantly the story of Moses’ birth according to the Midrashic tradition.”⁴ To the rabbis, Moses was the prototype of the Messiah. And, according to Rabbi Berakhiah, the final redeemer will be like the first (*Eccl. Rabbah* 1,9; *Targum Lamentations* 2,22). It is thus not surprising that the New Testament pictured so many of the patterns of Moses’ birth as repeating themselves in the birth of Jesus.

There is one feature of the birth of Jesus which seems to have no antecedent in the Moses accounts: the idea of the virgin conception. It is commonly believed that “there was no Jewish expectation that the Messiah would be God’s son in the sense of having been conceived without a male parent.”⁵ Traces of such an idea can, however, be found, and it is possible that there was at some point a legend about the supernatural conception of Moses, a legend that was later suppressed because of its similarities to the Jesus story.

The idea of supernatural conception is not totally alien to the history of Judaism. The idea may be found in Philo, who states (*On the Cherubim*, 40–48), that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses are not represented by the lawgiver as having known a woman. Sarah, according to Philo, conceived when God visited her in her solitude. Leah’s womb was opened by God, not by her husband. Similarly, Moses, when he took Zipporah, found her pregnant through “no mortal agency,” and Tamar and Hannah both received divine seed. Philo cautions his readers that these thoughts are “holy mysteries.” Given the complexity of Philo’s allegory, some have questioned whether he was really expressing a belief in a Divine conception.⁶ Goodenough feeds that Philo was, indeed, expressing such a belief, and that his *De Isaaca* may have been suppressed

3. P. Winter, “Jewish Folklore in the Matthean Birth Story,” *Hibbert Journal* 53 (1954–55): 40.

4. Renée Bloch, “Quelques Aspects de la Figure de Moïse dans la Tradition Rabinique,” *Moïse, l’Homme de l’Alliance*, pp. 164–165.

5. Brown, *Op. cit.*, p. 312.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 524.

(and lost) because of uncanny similarities with the birth and resurrection of Jesus.⁷

There may be a rabbinic text referring to the birth of the Messiah through an unusual seed. In *Genesis Rabbah* 23, in the comment on the verse (Gen. 4:25) "And she called his name Seth because God has appointed me another seed (*zera aher*)," Rabbi Tanhuma explained it in the name of Samuel Kuzit as referring to that seed which comes from another place (*mi'makom aher*), and that is the king Messiah. This line is found again in *Genesis Rabbah* 51 and in *Ruth Rabbah*, 8,1. This midrash was cited by some Christians in their disputations with Jews during the Middle Ages.⁸ Traditional Jewish interpreters took these statements to refer to the fact that the Messiah is descended from Ruth, who is of a strange seed, namely Moab, who was not to enter into the congregation of Israel. This interpretation, however, seems somewhat strained. The original sense of the text may have been that the Messiah was to have an unusual conception, and the idea that Moab was the strange seed may have been a secondary interpretation coming from a time when Jews wished to disassociate themselves from ideas that seemed too Christian.

There are two possible hints in Jewish literature that the conception of Moses may have been somewhat unusual. There is a strange line in the core portion of the Passover Haggadah, in the Midrashic explanation of the credo of Deut. 26, universally recognized as being very old, possibly pre-Maccabean.⁹ Deut. 26:7 reads, "And God saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression." The Haggadah explains "our affliction" as abstention from sexual intercourse, and gives as its proof-text Ex. 2:25, "And God saw the children of Israel and God knew." There is no difficulty in understanding how "affliction" was associated with sexual abstinence, for, as pointed out by David Daube, the verb "to afflict" is used in passages enjoining fasting on the Day of Atonement, and the rabbis understood such fasting as including abstaining from marital relations. The association of Ex. 2:25 with this idea is much more difficult. Daube suggests that the Midrash would then be that God saw the Israelites' abstinence from sexual intercourse and, since natural propagation was impossible, God intervened, and the women, or perhaps only the mother of Moses, conceived from God.¹⁰

Other midrashim definitely see God as actively involved in assisting the Israelites in procreating in Egypt. On the verse (Ex. 1:7), "And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly and multiplied and waxed exceedingly mighty, and the land was filled with

7. Erwin R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (New Haven, 1935), p. 155.

8. See Raymundus Martini, *Pugio Fidei*.

9. See Louis Finkelstein, "The Oldest Midrash," *Harvard Theological Review* XXI, 4 (1938).

10. David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London, 1956), p. 7.

them,” the rabbis commented that six children were born at each Israelite birth (*Exodus Rabbah* 1,8). Later, when Pharaoh placed taskmasters on the Israelites and forbade marital relations among them, God assisted the Israelite women when they went into the fields to feed their husbands and cohabit with them. When they gave birth in the fields, God sent angels to take care of the children (*Exodus Rabbah* 1,12). Given this context, it does not appear implausible that the Midrash in the Haggadah saw God as even more actively involved in the Israelite birth process.

The second possible hint of unusual conception is found in the Midrashic explication of the statement in Ex. 2:3 that Moses’ mother hid him for three months. The Jerusalem *Targum*, several of the later Midrashic works, and the commentary of Rashi, explain that Moses was born prematurely, after six months, and that his mother was thus able to hide him until the time that the Egyptians expected her to give birth. However, a tradition found in the Babylonian Talmud (*Sotah* 12a) gives a different explanation, namely that Yokheved was able to hide Moses for three months because she was already pregnant for three months at the time of her remarriage with Amram. The Egyptians suspected that she would give birth nine months after her remarriage, and so Yokheved was able to avoid the watchful eyes of the Egyptians for three months.

The exact timing of Amram and Yokheved’s divorce and remarriage is not spelled out. The common interpretation of the sequence of events is as follows: Amram divorces Yokheved upon hearing Pharaoh’s decree. He does not realize that she is already pregnant. Miriam intercedes and Amram remarries Yokheved three months after their separation. Six months later Moses is born.

The relatively late *Chronicles of Moses* and *Sefer ha-Yashar* give a three year time span to the divorce and remarriage of Amram and Yokheved. They suggest that Miriam was born at the beginning of the enslavement in Egypt (hence her name Miriam, from *mar*, or bitter) and that Aaron was born at the time that the decree was made to throw the Israelite male-children into the Nile. (The Torah does not explain how Aaron survived.) At that time, Amram separated from Yokheved. After three years, Miriam predicted the birth of a savior, and Amram remarried Yokheved, who became pregnant and gave birth.

The *Chronicles of Moses* do not deal with the question of the three months. *Sefer Ha-Yashar* does, however, and explains that Yokheved gave birth in the seventh month. This idea of the premature birth of Moses, already found in the Jerusalem *Targum*, is adopted by the *Midrash Hagadol* and by Rashi. This explanation has become so standard that, in more recent times, Louis Ginzberg, in his *Legends of the Jews*, writes that “Yokhebed gave birth to the child six months after concep-

tion."¹¹ Only in his notes do we learn that an alternative interpretation for the three month period exists.

These are naturalistic scenarios. However, there is another possible scenario which is based on an alternative interpretation of the tradition found in the Babylonian Talmud. Pharaoh issues his decree; Amram divorces Yokheved. A considerable time later, Miriam intercedes and Amram remarries his divorced wife, who is already pregnant, having conceived during the period of abstinence through some miraculous manner. This legend is not found as is, but is reconstructed from the known parts of the story. It fits the tenor of the other miraculous aspects of the pregnancy: conception at age 130, and the rejuvenation of Yokheved. It fits the image of the remarriage ceremony pictured by Rabbi Judah ben Zevina, of the angels singing, "The mother of the children rejoices," and of the children dancing before Yokheved. The great emphasis on Yokheved in this picture points to her being pregnant with the Hebrew savior.

Numerous parallels exist between the birth of Jesus as told in the New Testament and the birth of Moses as described in the Midrash. Both births are preceded by announcement of the coming of a savior. Both children are marked as special at birth. The births are accompanied by a manifestation of light. Each child faces a serious threat to life during his infancy. The one parallel to the birth story of Jesus which is conspicuously absent in the Midrashim of the birth of Moses is the Divine conception. The Midrash does, however, point to Divine assistance in the birth process of the Israelites in Egypt, and possible references to a miraculous conception are scattered in the Midrash. The suggestive tone of the line in the Passover Haggadah, "And God knew," as well as the statement in the Talmud that Yokheved was pregnant for three months before Amram remarried her, lead us to the possibility that a Jewish legend of a miraculous conception of Moses did, in fact, exist. If, indeed, there was such a legend, it was clearly suppressed. Ample reason certainly existed for such suppression by the rabbis. In Christianity, the belief in the divine conception of Jesus became a key element in the depiction of Jesus as son of God. This concept had no place in Judaism, nor in the story of its greatest hero, Moses. The hints that remain in rabbinic literature are, therefore, but traces of lost legends.

11. Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1920), vol. II, p. 264.

The Redemption of Moses

ERNEST NEUFELD

BROUGHT UP AS HE WAS FROM EARLY childhood in the household of Pharaoh, what vestige of his true identity was retained by Moses? Did he, reared as an Egyptian prince, know or consider the Israelite slaves to be his kinsmen? If he did, when and how did he learn of the relationship, and how could he have transcended the acculturative influences to which he was subject in the Egyptian court?

Contrary to the views of commentators generally that Moses somehow knew that he was a Hebrew while he was growing up in Pharaoh's palace,¹ there is no indisputable evidence in the Bible that Moses was aware of his Hebrew identity until God revealed Himself to him in the burning bush.

The Bible devotes but a few sentences relevant to the subject of Moses' sense of his identity, and they are indirect. We are informed that Pharaoh had decreed that all new-born male Hebrew children be drowned. When Moses was three months old, his mother placed him in a basket, which she left among the reeds of the Nile. He was found there by Pharaoh's daughter, and was brought up in the royal palace from the time he was weaned (Ex. 1:22;2:3-10). We learn that:

Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their toil. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen. He turned this way and that and, seeing no one about, struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, he found two Hebrews fighting, so he said to the offender, "Why do you strike your fellow?" (Ex. 2:11-13)*

These three verses have served as the basis for the thesis that Moses somehow acquired and retained a sense of identity as a Hebrew, and that his formative years spent in Pharaoh's court were unable to blot it out of his consciousness. The keystone sentence is, "He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen." The problem lies in determining whether we are seeing the scene with Moses' eyes, as the formulation of the verse would seem to indicate, or through the nar-

1. This question is discussed by Mordecai and Miriam Roshwald in *Moses: Leader, Prophet, Man* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1969), pp. 32ff. They provide a survey of the conjectures by commentators through the ages, all of whom assume that Moses knew his true identity.

*All Biblical citations are from the Jewish Publication Society translation.

ERNEST NEUFELD is retired, after a career in journalism, law, and New York City government.

rator's eyes. Commentators generally have been of the opinion that the first interpretation is correct. To answer the question of how Moses could have kept a sense of his identity as a Hebrew, they provide unsubstantiated explanations, such as that his adoptive mother told him; he found out who his parents were and went to visit them, and thus knew not only that the Hebrews were enslaved but he was instilled with a feeling for his people as a result; or, it is simply asserted as a fact that Moses knew and retained his true identity in spite of his acculturation.²

After Pharaoh's daughter rescued Moses, she unwittingly entrusted him to his own mother to be nursed. When the child grew, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who "made him her son" (Ex. 2:6–10). Evidently, from the text (9–10), this occurred when the child was weaned, so he could not have been more than two or three years old. Hence, whatever Hebrew influences he was exposed to as a babe could not have had a lasting effect, and, in any case, would have been deeply submerged under the weight of his Egyptian upbringing.

There is no direct evidence that Moses was informed or learned directly or indirectly of his kinship with the Hebrews. In the absence of such evidence, the conclusion that Moses did *not* know is as tenable as that he did know — indeed, even more likely. Undoubtedly, he could have known that there were Hebrews in Goshen, enslaved and forced to labor at erecting garrison cities for Pharaoh (Ex. 1:11). However, it does not follow that he would know from this, or through other means, that they were related to him.

The narrator relates that when Moses had grown up, "he went out among his brethren and witnessed their toil" (2:11), and the intimation drawn from that has been that Moses consequently must have known that they were his brethren, that being the reason why he went out to see their travail. In other words, the deduction results from the perception that the picture is presented from *Moses'* subjective point of view. However, I believe that the correct reading is that we are being informed objectively, through the *narrator's* eyes and understanding, that they were Moses' brethren. This is supported by the rest of the sentence, where we are told that the person being struck was a Hebrew and, further, that we should be aware that he was a kinsman of Moses. But, if the first part of the sentence means that Moses knew all along that the Hebrews were related to him, why should the narrator inject the information that the victim was Moses' kinsman? Indeed, one commentator observes that Moses "went out to see his kinsfolk" is "either an objective (not a subjective) statement, or his mother had taught him his true identity."³ It is noteworthy that he finds the verse ambiguous,

2. U. Cassuto, for example, so asserts in *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1987), (English translation), pp. 21–22.

3. W. Gunther Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American

and provides an alternative basis for concluding that Moses knew, if the statement is not objective.

Assuming, as we have shown is most likely, that Moses' mother did not instill it in him, perhaps his adoptive mother, Pharaoh's daughter, told him that his parents were Hebrews. Incredible. Why should or would she? To foster ambivalent feelings toward herself and perhaps alienate him from the Egyptians?

Another hypothesis has been that Pharaoh told Moses. Why would he? Why would Pharaoh, who viewed the increase of the Israelites in Egypt as a threat to his regime, and who had indulged his daughter by exempting from death a condemned Jewish child, want to inform that child, his grandson by adoption, that he belongs to an enslaved people whom he had determined to exterminate (Ex. 1:8–16, 22)?

Still another theory would have it that the Hebrew slaves told Moses who his parents were, and so he would visit them. The deduction of such visits depends on the supposition that the Hebrew slaves informed him. Would the Egyptian taskmasters have permitted any of the toiling Hebrews to approach a prince, no doubt clad as a prince of the royal house, and talk to him; or, if Moses approached them, would any Hebrew dare tell an Egyptian prince that he was no better than himself, a Hebrew slave? And if he had dared, would Moses have believed him?

Let us assume for the moment that Moses did not know that he was a Hebrew at the time when he witnessed the two incidents involving Hebrew slaves and proceeded to intervene. In that case, he would have been motivated only by an outraged sense of justice and empathy for the victim because he was the victim, and not because he was a kinsman. Such a reaction, uncolored by any taint of bias, would have been all the more remarkable in both situations, revealing a profound feeling for, and a commitment to, justice, and a character resolute and ready to come to its defense.

The text sheds no light in the aftermath of the fights in which Moses involved himself, as to his sense of self-identification at the time, but a clue exists in the way he acted when he observed another instance of injustice. Having fled Egypt after he learned that it was known that he had killed the Egyptian who beat the Hebrew, Moses arrived in Midian. The daughters of Jethro, priest of Midian, had filled the troughs at the well to water their flocks, but, as Moses approached, other shepherds drove off the women's flocks. The people involved were not Hebrews. Without hesitation, Moses came to the aid of the women, and watered their animals (Ex. 2:16–17). When their father learned how Moses had behaved, his reaction shows that he at once recognized the qualities of the rescuer. He was concerned that the Egyptian, as the girls had described him, be invited as a guest to his table, asked him

Hebrew Congregations, Jewish Publication Society, 1967), p. 389.

to stay, and, judging by the rapid pace of the narrative, lost no time in arranging for the marriage of his daughter, Zipporah, to Moses (Ex. 2:18–21).

Here is an instance in which all the participants were non-Hebrews, but Moses needed no self-identification with them in order to help the defenseless, convincingly demonstrating that he well might have acted similarly in the case of the Hebrews in Egypt, out of feelings of common humanity.

We have noted that Zipporah and her sisters took Moses for an Egyptian. Was he under that impression, too? Their conclusion was certainly based either on his clothing or the way he represented himself to them, probably both. Not until after God has revealed Himself to him and bidden him to return to Egypt to liberate His people, do we get direct evidence that Moses knew his true identity. It is the first time that the text cites him as speaking of the Hebrews as his kinsmen. He does so in asking Jethro to let him go back “to my kinsmen in Egypt and see how they are faring” (Ex. 4:18).

It would have been quite natural that Moses was unaware of his Hebrew descent until God revealed it to him. He had lived in Pharaoh’s palace until he was an adult, had been brought up as a prince, and so educated. According to the Midrash, his adoptive mother and Pharaoh chose the wisest teachers to instruct him, and soon he excelled them in knowledge.⁴ It is hard to see how he could have retained a sense of his true identity after so many years of assimilative influences. Whatever ember of his Hebrew self existed in his subconscious had to be stirred, not only by God’s revelation of Himself to him, but, also, by His revelation of Moses to himself (Ex. 3:2 ff). This revelation was all the more overwhelming and poignant because of Moses’ recent intervention in behalf of Hebrews who, he now discovered, were his kinsmen. How startling an impact this revelation must have had on Moses, to discover in a theophany who he was and, in a flash, to begin to discern the wellspring of his empathy for the Hebrews back in Egypt!

In connection with the problem of Moses’ self-identification, we must also consider the immediate consequence of his slaying of the Egyptian. When Pharaoh learned of it, “he sought to have Moses killed” (Ex. 2:15). Why should Pharaoh want to have him killed without even bringing him before him? After all, Moses was a prince, an adopted grandson of Pharaoh! It does not seem possible that an Egyptian prince would be condemned to death out of hand for killing a commoner. Then what moved Pharaoh to want to kill Moses without delay?

Pharaoh knew from the beginning that Moses was a Hebrew child whom his daughter had saved despite Pharaoh’s decree of extermina-

4. Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1956), one volume edition, p. 254.

tion, and he could hardly have considered him a true Egyptian. Thus, *he* knew what Moses may well not have. He knew that Moses, by slaying the Egyptian, had committed himself, whether he knew it or not, to the cause of the Israelites. His life, forfeit at birth because of Pharaoh's edict that all male Israelites be killed in infancy, but spared out of consideration for his daughter, was forfeit without remission, for in the eyes of Pharaoh he was a Hebrew now.

This is a crucial point. By killing the Egyptian, Moses, knowingly or unknowingly, had already taken the Israelite side. Hence, when God tells him in Midian that he has chosen him as His emissary to Pharaoh, Moses in a sense had already irrevocably espoused his kinfolk's cause, though the text gives no indication that he comprehended the implications of his act in this respect. On the contrary, his objections to being selected to free the Israelites, betoken otherwise. Such obliviousness on Moses' part to the full significance of his homicide of the Egyptian, further demonstrates that he did not conceive of himself as an Israelite prior to the revelation from God.

At this point it is well to review in detail the theophany at the burning bush. The scene unfolds as Moses was tending the flock of Jethro in the wilderness, and came to the mountain of Horeb, the mountain of God.

An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. Moses said, "I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight. Why is the bush not burnt?" When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: "Moses! Moses?" He answered, "Here I am." And He said, "Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground. I am," He said, "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (3:1-6).

Moses must have been stunned. Who is this God who announces to him that He is the God of his father and his father's ancestors? Who was his father and these ancestors? Could they be those of the Hebrew slaves? How could that be, he being an Egyptian? If Moses knew that he was Jewish, why does God now provide this information to him? Is this a valid attribution to Moses of the confused emotions that he experienced when he was instructed as to his ancestry? Let us read on.

The Lord further tells Moses that He has noted the suffering of His people, the Hebrews, and has determined to save them from the Egyptians and bring them into Canaan. He then calls on Moses to be His agent to lead them into freedom (3:7-9).

"Come, therefore," the Lord commands, "I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt" (3:10).

Moses replies, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt” (3:11)?

This question is open to two interpretations. It can be read to mean that Moses felt inadequate to the task, as his later excuses would intimate (4:1,10). But it can also be understood as, “Who am I, an Egyptian, to come to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?” Was he still differentiating himself from them?

In any case, Moses’ question betrays a lack of comprehension at this point of the full implications of the revelation that he has received. The Lord spoke of “My people,” but, evidently, Moses did not perceive “My people,” whom the Lord refers to, as his people, whether his question conveyed self-doubt or lack of identification with the Hebrews.

Even when reassured by God that He will be with him (3:12), Moses is unsure of his mission. He anticipates that the Hebrews will not believe him when he announces to them that he was sent by God to liberate them: “What if they shall say to me: ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” (3:13)*

In the state of perplexity that Moses finds himself, God tells Moses that His name is “*Eheyeh-Asher-Eheyeh*” (“I am that I am” — literally, “I shall be what I shall be”), and instructs him: “Thus shall you say to the Israelites, ‘*Ehyeh* sent me to you’” (3:14).

What effect would this pronouncement, including the sententious, mysterious phrase, “I am that I am,” have had on Moses? It is not a disclosure of a name but a perplexing declaration, an affirmation of the Lord’s absolute existence and eternality, autonomy and unique identity, His justice and mercy, and untrammelled power⁵ — this, to a Moses who still did not fully comprehend the “I am” of his own being!

That Moses was in mental turmoil, and that God recognized this, is suggested by the text, for, in the very next sentence (3:15), God starts over, *Vayomer od Elokim el Moshe* (and God spoke again to Moses), and this time God instructs him to tell the Israelites that His name is YHWH (this is its *written* form; when spoken it is translated — except by the High Priest on Yom Kippur — to *Adonai*, Lord, from the Hebrew word *adon*, or master). God goes further, explaining that this God, who is sending Moses to them with the promise of freedom, is the “God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

This was the moment when the revelation in all its import dawned on Moses. He now grasped that the God of his father and of his ancestors (3:6) was also the God of the fathers of the Israelites. He was seized with cognition of his true identity. He was an Israelite! He was not an Egyptian!

5. *Exodus Rabbah*, 3:6.

*Throughout the theophany, until God reveals His name to Moses, God refers to Himself by the general name of *Elohim*.

Moses was now ready to undertake the assignment that the Lord wanted him to assume, but he could not quite shake off the doubts that disturbed him. How was it that God, the God of his people, summoned him to their help but he still hung back?

Moses felt unsure of himself, even though the Lord sought to reassure him by a lengthy exposition of how He would free the Israelites and bring them into the land of Canaan, how the people would heed Moses' words, and how the Lord would pave the way for the liberation of His people despite the recalcitrance of Pharaoh, all of which Moses was to convey to the people (13:16–22).

"What if they do not believe me, and do not listen to me?" says the hesitant Moses, "but say, 'The Lord did not appear to you'" (4:2).

How is it that Moses felt himself so unqualified, so insecure in a role of leadership, so uncertain that he can convince the people, so lacking in faith, when the Lord had promised to be with him and was Himself coming to rescue His people?

How is it then, when it was clear that Moses must know that he was a Hebrew and was selected by the Lord to lead his fellow Israelites out of Egypt, that he dragged his feet, finding more excuses? Such reluctance at this point confutes the opinion that, back in Egypt, Moses knew that he was a Hebrew and, for that reason, intervened in the beating and fight involving Hebrews there. If he was so zealous in behalf of his Hebrew kinsmen then, why was he so irresolute now, when it comes to leading them out of bondage with the guidance and help of the Lord?

Moses has yet another obstacle which he foresees — his speech impediment: "Please, O Lord, I have never been a man of words . . . I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (4:10).

The Lord assures Moses that he need have no fear, for:

Who gives man speech? Is it not I, the Lord,
Who makes him dumb or deaf, seeing or blind?
Now go, and I will be with you as you speak and
will tell you what to say" (4:11–12).

Moses still is reluctant. He pleads that God send someone else (4:13).

And now comes another thunderclap of revelation, as the Lord loses patience. Moses is told that he has a brother, Aaron! And this brother, the Lord informs him, "speaks well." What is more, even then he is coming to meet Moses and will be his spokesman with the help of the Lord (4:14–16).

Moses is overwhelmed, tongue-tied, dumbfounded. Without another word, supported by the rod that the Lord provided to him to invoke His miracles (4:17), Moses returns to his father-in-law, Jethro, and immediately asks for his consent that he return to Egypt to see how his "kinsmen" are doing (4:18).

“Kinsmen” without further explanation, as the text indicates, by now means one thing to Moses but may well have meant another to Jethro, who still thought of Moses as an Egyptian. That Jethro still labored under this impression is evidenced by his laconic reply to Moses, “Go in peace.” Jethro felt that it was but natural that Moses would want to go back to Egypt to see his kinsmen, and found no reason to question him.

We have to try to define for ourselves Moses’ mental state in the moments when he learned his true identity and the identity of his God, and was called on to be His instrument for liberating the Israelites. Given the circumstances of Moses’ childhood and youth, given all that he had been taught and led to believe about himself, would it not be surprising, even unreasonable, to expect him to react with other than hesitation and irresolution? Would not the sudden revelation of his true identity, entailing the complete erasure of his former self-image, leave him at least temporarily confused and indecisive? Could anyone have expected him in such distress to respond with an unequivocal, “Ready and able”?

Furthermore, the reasons that Moses advanced in proposing that God select someone else for His mission, do not fit in with the picture evoked by commentators generally that Moses, when he grew to adulthood, somehow, by some unknown means, or assumed circumstances, was conscious of being a Hebrew and devoted to their welfare. Why would he be bold in Egypt, but reluctant at Horeb? On the other hand, his reluctance is perfectly compatible with a Moses who had not identified himself with the Hebrews before the Divine revelation in the burning bush. The indecisive, hesitant, diffident Moses who voiced objections to being chosen, is not Moses as we knew him in Egypt. His hesitation to undertake God’s mission is understandable in all of its aspects, even though, at this point, he knew his true identity and, perhaps, the roots of his sympathy for their suffering, if we assess it in the context of the sudden transformation of psyche that he was required to effect.

When God told Moses to go to Pharaoh and demand the release of the Israelites, he asked “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?” (3:10–11). God’s answer that He would be with him and give him a sign that it was He Who sent him (3:12), implies that Moses’ question related solely to his feeling that he was unimportant and powerless in the eyes of mighty Pharaoh. But his question might also indicate that, as one who was once an Egyptian prince and now a shepherd in Midian, and was under a sentence of death by Pharaoh, he was hardly the best choice for the role that God wanted to assign to him. (It is not until after Moses received the call and made his series of objections that he was told by the Lord that the Pharaoh who sought to have him killed is dead) (4:19).

If this reconstruction of Moses’ mental state is valid, how much

more credit does he deserve for undertaking the task that God gave him? He had just learned who he was, Who his God was, who his people were, and that he had a brother, while at the same time, for all he knew, he was still threatened with death if he should return to Egypt. Yet, he acquiesced finally to God's assignment.

How ironic that a Hebrew child, the adopted grandson of Pharaoh, brought up in the Egyptian way of life in the royal court, was the one whom the God of Israel chose as His instrument to deliver His people from the hands of the god-king of Egypt! God elected Moses, not his elder brother Aaron, who was brought up as a Hebrew in his parents' house.⁶ He picked Moses, a man in whom Pharaoh well might have believed that every vestige of Hebrew consciousness had been extinguished — just as Pharaoh, by other means, was trying to extirpate the rest of the enslaved Israelites.

How ironic that Moses, who was so so quick, unhesitating, ready, and resolute in coming to the aid of two individual victims in Egypt, should have been so hesitant, irresolute, and feel so unqualified to assume the responsibility that God decided to entrust to him for freeing his thousands of kinsmen — and yet, to have retained that ember of his identity that could be fired in their cause by God. That is the ultimate irony, the transformation of an all-but-assimilated Hebrew into an uncompromising champion and defender of his and God's chosen people, demonstrating that, ultimately, it is God whose transcendent will directs the course of history.

Thus did God redeem Moses from his bondage for the redemption of the Israelites from theirs.

6. How Aaron escaped Pharaoh's decree is not explained in the Bible.

MOVING?

Subscribers are urgently requested to notify our office in writing six weeks before a change of address takes place. In the absence of such notification, all copies returned to us by the post office will be remailed only upon the payment of the additional postage.

All copies that are not returned to us by the post office will be replaced only upon the payment for the additional copy, as well as for the additional postage.

Dilemmas of Modern Orthodoxy: Sociological and Philosophical

CHAIM I. WAXMAN

IN AN ARTICLE WRITTEN IN COMMEMORATION of the one hundredth anniversary of the death of the late Samson Raphael Hirsch, founding rabbi of the organized Orthodox Jewish community in Frankfurt, Germany, the contemporary chief rabbi of that transplanted community in Washington Heights, New York City, Shimon Schwab, bemoaned the status which Hirsch had attained within the contemporary Orthodox community. Schwab declared that,

what is happening today makes me weep, literally. Of late, Hirsch has become the property of the left-of-center "Modern Orthodox" movement, consisting of those who are Mizrachi-oriented. They have changed the image of Hirsch from that of a vigorous fighter for *Torat emet* into that of a docile, dove-like apologist for a watered-down version of convenient Judaism.¹

In order to evaluate Schwab's assertion, it is important to understand precisely whom he had in mind in his characterization of "Modern Orthodox." There are at least two distinct types of Modern Orthodox, depending largely on the criteria used for defining the group. One is philosophically or ideologically modern, while the other is more appropriately characterized as behaviorally modern. In the category of philosophically Modern Orthodox² would be those who are meticulously observant of Halakhah but are, nevertheless, philosophically modern. Within this context, being modern means, at minimum, having a positive perspective on general education and knowledge; viewing oneself, from a religious perspective, as being part of, and having responsibility for, both the larger Jewish community as well as society in general; and being positively disposed to Israel and religious Zionism.

The behaviorally Modern Orthodox, on the other hand, are not deeply concerned with philosophical ideas about either modernity or religious Zionism. By and large, they define themselves as Modern Orthodox in the sense that they are not meticulously observant. In many ways, their definition of themselves as Modern Orthodox has the same basis as did those whom Marshall Sklare found to define themselves

1. Rav Shimon Schwab, "Rav S.R. Hirsch — The Leader and Fighter," in *The Living Hirschian Legacy: Essays on "Torah im Derekh Eretz" and the Contemporary Hirschian Kehilla* (New York, 1988), p. 73.

2. The upper case is used for this group because it is ideologically modern.

CHAIM I. WAXMAN is Professor of Sociology at Rutgers University.

as Conservative. That is, when asked, "What do you mean when you say you are Conservative?" the responses were, typically: "Now — I'd guess you'd call it middle of the road, as far as (not) being as strict as the Orthodox, yet not quite as Reformed as the Reformed," or "... I don't like the old-fashioned type, or the Reform. I'm between the two of them."³ Similarly, most of those who define themselves as Modern Orthodox do so in reference to right-wing or "Sectarian" Orthodoxy, and they define themselves as modern in the sense that they are not as observant. As Heilman and Cohen put it:

Others, the so-called "Modern Orthodox," have tried to find a way of remaining linked to the contemporary non-Jewish world in which they find themselves and to the traditions and practices of Judaism to which they remain loyal. For some, this has meant little more than a nominal attachment to Orthodoxy while for others it has meant little more than a partial attachment to the demands of the tradition.⁴

This group is appropriately described as "modern" in the sense that those who see themselves as part of it are committed to the tradition, in general, but feel free to pick and choose in their observance of rituals. In contrast to the more traditional Orthodox, they do not observe all of the rituals as deemed obligatory by the traditional community. Their sense of "freedom of choice," although never articulated theoretically, is as evident as it is among many other contemporary Americans who view themselves as religiously traditional but, nevertheless, are selective in their religiosity.⁵

If this is the group to which Schwab was referring, then he is clearly correct in his complete rejection of the notion that Hirsch may be viewed as its founding father. Indeed, as Mordechai Breuer points out, selective-observance such as this was prevalent in German Orthodoxy even before Hirsch. Nor did Hirsch or any other recognized Orthodox rabbinic authority ever overtly condone many of the practices which were widely prevalent among a significant segment of the Orthodox community there.⁶ Indeed, as previously suggested, many of those within this type of Modern Orthodoxy behave the way they do precisely because they are modern; thus, they feel that there are certain decisions which they are competent of making on their own and that they are not going to behave in ways which they see as inappropriate to modern society. The fact that they "identify" with Hirsch has as much validity as does the identification of many pro-Israel religious traditionalists with

3. Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement*, Augmented Ed. (New York, 1972), p. 208.

4. Samuel C. Heilman and Steven M. Cohen, *Cosmopolitans and Parochials: Modern Orthodox Jews in America* (Chicago, 1989), p. 39.

5. Wade Clark Roofe and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion* (New Brunswick, 1988).

6. Mordechai Breuer, *Edah Udyuknah: Ortodoksiah Yehudit BaReich HaGermani, 1871–1918: Historiah Hevratit Shel Mi'ut Dati* (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 20–61.

the late Chief Rabbi of the Holy Land, Abraham I. Kook. Most of them have never studied his works, and they attribute to him ideas and positions which he would have rejected outright.

On the other hand, Schwab may have had the ideologically Modern Orthodox in mind,⁷ and, especially, the institution from which he is spiritually very distant, Yeshiva University.⁸ Given his antipathy to that institution, he was probably upset with its establishment of a "Samson R. Hirsch Chair of *Torah im Derekh Eretz*." His personal views aside, it is, in fact, highly questionable whether Hirsch should legitimately be viewed as the founding father of the Modern Orthodoxy represented by Yeshiva University. Indeed, neither the approach of Hirsch nor that of the founding president of Yeshiva, Bernard Revel, to *Torah im derekh eretz*, were so clearly formulated that what those individuals actually intended is beyond dispute.

As for Hirsch, many of his interpreters argue that part of the novelty in his approach was in the fact that his efforts to combine Torah and general knowledge were not merely pragmatic tactics necessitated by the sad realities of modernity, but were ends in and of themselves. As Pinchas Rosenblitt put it, "He was very far from viewing the combination of these two areas as a tactic and concession."⁹ Similarly, Mordechai Eliav asserts that Hirsch "made every effort to achieve a complete blending and an organic integration between Torah learning and general studies."¹⁰

Mordechai Breuer elaborates on the notion of integration. He states that

the concept *Torah-im-derekh-eretz* for Hirsch was defined as a synthesis. This definition is correct only in the Hegelian sense: two forces, which are in opposition to each other and struggle with each other, are resolved and renewed on a higher plain. In the language of the natural sciences it could be defined: *Torah-im-derekh-eretz* is not a physical integration but a chemical blending. Torah and life, Judaism and culture, do not complement one another, but achieve complete identity. . . . Therefore, in the doctrine of *Torah-im-derekh-eretz* according to R.S.R. Hirsch, there is

7. The fact that Schwab uses the upper case, "Modern Orthodox," may be an indication of his including the ideological as well as the behavioral.

8. For example, in one of his articles in the Bulletin of K'hal Adath Jeshurun, under the rubric of "brotherly love," he caustically condemns a number of Talmud scholars — he refers to them both as "modern orthodox" and "centrist," so that the intent is obvious — because of their Religious Zionism. He singles out one "*Talmud Chochom she-ain bo de-ah*" (a Talmud scholar who has no intelligence), who "notwithstanding his erudition and scholarly achievements . . . is a child of our dark age and a victim of garbled teachings by his highly controversial role models" (Rav Simon Schwab, "He Who Loves Does Not Hate," *Mitteilungen* XLIX, April/May 1989: p. 2).

9. Pinchas Rosenblitt, "Hirsch's Understanding of the Torah im Derekh Eretz Approach: A New Evaluation," *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress for Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1977), Vol. 3, p. 470 (in Hebrew).

10. Mordechai Eliav, "Various Approaches to Torah im Derekh Eretz: Ideal and Reality," in Mordechai Breuer, ed., *Torah im Derekh Eretz* (Ramat Gan, 1987), p. 48 (in Hebrew).

nothing of a concession of principle to the spirit of the times or any pragmatic consideration of practical necessities in the generation of the Emancipation.¹¹

All of these, and others, interpret Hirsch as an advocate of true synthesis, and many draw the contrast between him and another prominent German rabbi, his colleague, Esriel Hildesheimer. Ironically, although Hildesheimer was the founder, against Hirsch's wishes, of the first Orthodox rabbinical seminary in Germany to incorporate modern Jewish studies in its curriculum, his approach to general knowledge was very different from that of Hirsch. Hildesheimer was the pragmatist rather than the philosopher, and advocated secular studies alongside, but clearly not synthesized with, Torah, and only as a concession to the needs of the day.¹²

However, not all students of Hirsch agree on the status which he attributed to general knowledge. For example, from Isaac Breuer, Hirsch's grandson,¹³ it would seem that he was not a staunch believer in synthesis. He avers that

Rabbi Hirsch's fight was not for balance and not for reconciliation, nor for synthesis and certainly not for parallel power, but for domination — for the true and absolute domination of the divine precept over the new tendencies....

Rabbi Hirsch's epigones quoted the principle "Torah im Derekh Eretz" more frequently than the master himself. As for him, he drew on it mainly for the obvious confirmation of the fact ... that the aim and end of the Torah should not be confined to the house of learning, but that it should be brought into contact with and applied to the prevailing conditions of life.¹⁴

Likewise, Zvi Kurzweil agrees that Hirsch saw the arts and sciences as subsidiary to Torah and may be studied as the basis for making a livelihood, to enhance the understanding of Torah, and in order to be able to defend the tenets of Judaism.¹⁵ And Schwab is perhaps most forceful when he asserts that Hirsch's *Torah im derekh erez* "was a time-bound halachic compromise."¹⁶

It is not only with respect to Hirsch and his views on the relationship

11. Mordechai Breuer, "The Doctrine of *Torah-im-derekh-eret* in the Philosophy of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch," *Hama'ayan* 9 (No. 1, Tishrei) 5729 (1968): p. 15 (in Hebrew).

12. For a biographical study of Hildesheimer, see David Ellenson, *Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer and the Creation of a Modern Jewish Orthodoxy* (Tuscaloosa, 1990). See, also, Azriel Hildesheimer, "Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer and his Perspective on *Torah im Derekh Eretz*," in Mordechai Breuer, ed., *Torah im Derekh Eretz Movement*, pp. 75–82 (in Hebrew).

13. He was also the father of Mordechai Breuer, cited above.

14. Isaac Breuer, "Samson Raphael Hirsch," in Leo Jung, ed., *Jewish Leaders (1750–1940)* (New York, 1953), pp. 168–69.

15. Zvi Kurzweil, *The Modern Impulse of Traditional Judaism* (Hoboken, NJ, 1985), pp. 16–30.

16. Rav Shimon Schwab, *Selected Speeches* (New York, 1991), p. 239.

between Torah and general learning that there is disagreement. There also appears to be something of a question as to the perspectives of Bernard Revel, founding president of Yeshiva College (later, University), on the nature of the relationship between Torah and secular learning. Aaron Rothkoff asserts that Revel did not share Hirsch's positive attitude toward secular study. Rather, he saw it as an inescapable concession to the realities of American society at that time. As Rothkoff puts it,

Revel did not conceive of the proposed college in terms of Hirsch's ideals . . . Revel was only concerned with his attempts to guide the Yeshiva successfully through the labyrinths of American life. He felt that, for this, the proposed college was a necessity if the Yeshiva was to retain its brightest high school graduates.¹⁷

Jacob J. Schacter, on the other hand, argues that all evidence indicates that Revel maintained that the combination of Torah and secular learning is not merely a compromise but, rather, that within the Jewish perspective there is an intrinsic relationship between them.¹⁸

Be that as it may, the leaders of Modern Orthodoxy are much more the products of Yeshiva University under the leadership of Revel's successor, Samuel Belkin, than under Revel. In his inaugural address, in 1943, Belkin declared his conception of the "synthesis" which, although different from both Hirsch and Revel, however each of them is interpreted, indicates his belief in the inherent value of secular knowledge. He stated that

it is not our intention to make science the handmaiden of religion nor religion the handmaiden of science. We do not believe in a scientific religion nor in a pseudo-science. We prefer to look upon science and religion as separate domains which need not be in serious conflict and, therefore, need no reconciliation. If we seek the blending of science and religion and the integration of secular knowledge with sacred wisdom, then it is not in the subject matter of these fields but rather within the personality of the individual that we hope to achieve the synthesis.¹⁹

Norman Lamm, Belkin's successor and current president of Yeshiva University, has written at length on the subject of "*Torah Umadda*" — "religious learning and worldly knowledge," the logo of Yeshiva University — and he develops it analytically in much greater length and with much more intellectual sophistication. From his perspective,

advocates of *Torah Umadda* do not accept that Torah is fundamentally at odds with the world, that Jewishness and Jewish faith on the one side, and the universal concerns and preoccupations of humanity, on the other,

17. Aaron Rothkoff, *Bernard Revel: Builder of American Jewish Orthodoxy* (Philadelphia, 1972), p. 72.

18. Jacob J. Schacter, "Torah U-Madda Revisited: The Editor's Introduction," *Torah U-Madda Journal*, Vol. 1, 1989: 18, n. 14. For Rothkoff's response, see *Torah U-Madda Journal*, Vol. 2, 1990: 134.

19. Samuel Belkin, *Essays in Traditional Jewish Thought* (New York, 1956), pp. 16–17.

are fundamentally inapposite, and that Torah and Madda therefore require substantive “reconciliation.” Rather, whereas it may be true that effectively Torah and culture have become estranged from each other . . . in essence they are part of one continuum. Hence, the motivating mission of Torah Umadda must be to reunite and restore an original harmony.²⁰

However, neither Yeshiva University nor Modern Orthodoxy is limited to the perspectives of Belkin and Lamm on the relationship between Torah learning and worldly knowledge. Also, even if the views of Hirsch were the same as those of Yeshiva University and Modern Orthodoxy, Schwab would still be correct in rejecting the notion that Hirsch was the father of Modern Orthodoxy. And, ironically, although Hildesheimer was not an advocate of a synthesis between religious learning and worldly knowledge, if one looks at the broad range of his thought and activities, he emerges as a much more accurate model than Hirsch of what Yeshiva University and Modern Orthodoxy do actually represent.

In contrast to Hirsch, who separated himself and his community from the larger Jewish community and who was, at best, unsympathetic to Zionist efforts, Hildesheimer undertook a variety of actions which render him a Modern Orthodox activist and institution-builder. Four of the more basic of his achievements can be cited as conclusive:

1. Hildesheimer established Jewish education for males and females which included both religious and secular studies.
2. He established a seminary which incorporated not only secular studies but academic scholarship.
3. Not being a sectarian as was Hirsch, Hildesheimer worked with communal leaders, even non-Orthodox ones, on issues that affected the community, such as anti-Semitism and ritual slaughtering.
4. He maintained traditional Jewish attachments to *Erez Yisrael* and worked with the non-Orthodox on its behalf.²¹

It should be noted, however, that Hildesheimer would probably have preferred the term “Modern Orthodoxy,” and rejected the appellation “Centrist,” which, in certain circles, has come to replace it. About those who called themselves “Centrists” in his time, he said: “On the two sides of the street, the right and the left, people go. Only horses go in the middle.”²²

Be that as it may, a recent study of male and female undergraduates at Yeshiva University indicates the rather high correlation between Hildesheimer’s perspectives and those of contemporary Modern Orthodox American Jews.²³ As per the previous discussion, Yeshiva University

20. Normal Lamm, *Torah Umadda: The Encounter of Religious Learning and Worldly Knowledge in the Jewish Tradition* (Northvale, NJ, 1990), pp. 142–43.

21. Ellenson, *Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer*, pp. 73–165.

22. Quoted in Breuer, *Edah Udyuknah*, p. 30.

23. Although the university is open to students of all races and religions, the overwhelm-

(YU) is perhaps most distinguished from the sectarian yeshivas in its commitment to, as its seal reads, *Torah Umadda*, all knowledge as an ideal. On those questions which most explicitly manifest beliefs and attitudes about secular education, the respondents also scored rather highly on a scale designed to rank beliefs, values, and patterns of behavior in terms of traditionalism (low) and modernism (high). Thus, 82.3 percent disagreed that "[i]deally, a Jew should study *Torah* only, without any secular study."²⁴

In contrast to the stereotype of traditional Orthodox Jews as removed from the affairs of the country and the world except as they directly pertain to Jews, the majority of the respondents viewed such involvement as an imperative. Thus, more than two-thirds (67.3%) agreed with the statement, "Jews have an obligation to become involved in the affairs of the country and the world and, therefore, should be involved in all political issues." That percentage appears to be considerably higher than that typical of the American population as a whole, at least as indicated by voting rates in both national and local elections. On the other hand, of course, there is a difference between agreeing about the importance of becoming involved and actually voting. Perhaps the percentage of those in the American population who would agree with the statement is no smaller than the percentage among YU undergraduates. It would be revealing, therefore, to determine the percentage of registered voters among YU undergraduates and to compare that with the percentage among undergraduates in the general American population. It would also be revealing to undertake a study of

ing majority of students at the male college, Yeshiva College (YC), and the female college, Stern College for Women (SCW), are Orthodox Jews. A major objective of the study was to determine the extent to which the students experience conflicts between their religious beliefs and living in modern, Western society. Following from meetings with focus groups from both YC and SCW, a number of specific issues seemed most likely to be potentially problematic for these students at this time. The major issues were: secular education; social contact with non-Jews; relations with non-Orthodox Jews; the roles of Jewish women; the Holocaust; Israel; and cheating in school and in business. The detailed findings are in Chaim I. Waxman, "Orthodoxy and Modernity: Contradictory or Compatible?" paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Salt Lake City, October 19–21, 1989; and Waxman, "Orthodox Judaism and Modern Society: A Study of Undergraduates at Yeshiva University" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Israel Sociological Society, Bar Ilan University, Feb. 7–8, 1990).

24. Females scored somewhat higher on the scale than did males. At YC, students in the theological seminary were somewhat less modernist than were students in the other Jewish studies programs, but at SCW no such differences were detected, probably because it has a single program of Jewish studies. In both schools, commitment to the intrinsic value of secular education is highest among those aged 20–21 and among those majoring in the social sciences. Perhaps not surprisingly, such commitment is lowest, although still high, among those majoring in the physical sciences, pre-med., mathematics, and computers.

traditional Orthodox Jews and ascertain the degree to which the aforementioned stereotype has any empirical validity.

The whole topic of the State of Israel received the highest score on the traditionalism-modernism scale and, indeed, it turns out that, in this instance, YU undergraduates are considerably more modern than was Hildesheimer. For example, a specific area in which the respondents manifested a rather high level of modernism was in the manner in which they relate to the State of Israel. On this issue, traditionalists were defined as those for whom Israel has religious significance solely as *Erez Yisrael*, the Holy Land. The State of Israel, qua state, is a modern, essentially secular, political entity, and its only significance to the traditionalist as conceived herein lies in the fact that so many Jews live there. The modernist, on the other hand, ascribes religious significance to the State specifically as a political entity, and the modernist perceives the State of Israel as an inherent part of Messianic redemption. The vast majority of students reject — 72.8 percent strongly and 15 percent mildly — the traditionalist notion that the State of Israel has significance only because so many Jews live there. They view the State of Israel as having religious significance, and most (86.3%) agree either strongly or mildly that it is “part of Messianic redemption.” By contrast, although Hildesheimer had a love of Zion which “sprang from deep religious roots, . . . his commitments to *Erez Yisrael* should be regarded primarily as religious-philanthropic, not secular-nationalistic.”²⁵ The Zionism of YU undergraduates, apparently, is not quite either of those. It is a moderate version of religious-nationalistic.

With respect to religious education for women, almost 80 percent believe that women may study Talmud, and 70.1 percent believe that “[w]omen should have the same opportunity to learn as men, both qualitatively and quantitatively.” It should be noted that there was no significant difference in the responses of female and male students to this question.

Finally, it should be mentioned, although this subject was not part of the survey, that Yeshiva University is closer to Hildesheimer than to Hirsch in that it has a school of higher Jewish studies, and many students in the theological seminary take courses in that school, as well.

Despite all this, there are a number of reasons why Hirsch, rather than Hildesheimer, should be portrayed as the model for Modern Orthodoxy. Of primary significance, of course, was Hirsch’s overtly favorable approach to modern culture. In addition, although Hildesheimer did establish a modern rabbinical seminary which included a number of outstanding faculty members, such as David Zvi Hoffmann, he did not establish a community or a following as did Hirsch. His contributions, therefore, were more amorphous. One cannot point to

25. Ellenson, *Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer*, p. 109.

a specific, organized community or even institution that views itself as the direct transmitter of Hildesheimer's teachings, in the way that one can point to specific Hirschian communities.

There are, undoubtedly, several factors, both individual and sociological, which account for this critical difference between the two. On the individual level, Hirsch had a strong presence; he was a master in the professional presentation of self. As Mordechai Breuer suggests, "Hirsch was the ideologue of Modern Orthodoxy — he was a great speaker and a sharp writer."²⁶ He was also a thinker, a philosopher, in contrast to Hildesheimer, who was a *posek*, a decisor of halakhah, and a pragmatic man of action.²⁷

Hirsch's thought and demeanor led him to separate himself and his community from the larger Jewish community. Whatever else might be said about that action, it had the advantage of setting firm and clear boundaries between the "*Gemeinde*," the Hirschian Orthodox community, and the rest of German Jewry. All religious orthodoxies, as James Hunter points out, have a special interest in establishing and maintaining symbolic boundaries. As he indicates,

Orthodoxies are unique because of the *special significance* bestowed upon the symbolic boundaries which constitute the tradition. Those boundaries are regarded as timeless . . . The claim of the orthodox, then, is that they alone are the keepers of the tradition; they alone are the protectors of the true faith. Their stake in keeping the tradition sound and unqualified is high because their very identity and purpose as religious people (both collectively and individually) are bound to that mission . . . For the orthodox, the symbolic boundaries mean everything.²⁸

The Hirschian community, through its overt separation from the larger Jewish community, achieved an even higher level of self-consciousness as a distinct community. Thus, it developed a highly-honed sense of itself as the true bearer of a very special tradition.

The irony of that, however, is that, in the final analysis, it serves to underscore the argument made by Schwab. For when all is said and done, it is traditional, Sectarian Orthodoxy which has been successful in maintaining and even strengthening itself as a community. By contrast, although there may be many individuals who define themselves as Modern Orthodox, Modern Orthodoxy has not established itself as a real movement in the way that Sectarian Orthodoxy has, nor is it likely to. There are a number of basic sociological reasons for this.

One of the characteristics of traditional Orthodoxy, indeed, of all religious orthodoxies, is the submission to the authority of the tradition. Authority and tradition are a prerequisite for religious orthodoxy. Within an orthodoxy, the individual is expected so to internalize tradition

26. Mordechai Breuer, *Edah Udyuknah*, p. 56.

27. Ellenson, *Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer*, pp. xi–xii.

28. James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago, 1987), p. 159.

as to perceive himself as not having any choice but to conform to all of its dictates. The notion that the individual has the ability to choose is “heretical,” as Peter Berger elucidates. As he points out, “The English word ‘heresy’ comes from the Greek verb *hairein*, which means to choose. A *hairesis* originally meant, quite simply, the taking of choice.”²⁹ From the perspective of religious orthodoxy, one has no choice,³⁰ and, from the perspective of traditional Jewish Orthodoxy, the absence of choice includes the inevitable submission to the ultimate authority of the rabbinic-scholarly elite.

The majority of those who consider themselves Modern Orthodox are so behaviorally rather than philosophically. As indicated previously, it is their very selectivity in observance that manifests their modernity. However, for them, that selectivity is almost solely a matter of personal choice. They usually do not seek to legitimize their behavior ideologically — halakhically — nor do they feel a need to. Thus, although they feel free to choose, they do not challenge the authority of the sectarian scholarly elite, and, since they are not a challenge to that authority, they are tolerated by that elite and can still feel themselves part of the community.³¹ As a result, the sectarians have a virtual monopoly on authority. Indeed, it may be argued that the deviance of Reform and Conservative Judaism, as defined by Orthodoxy, is not so much that they do not behaviorally conform to the norms as prescribed by Orthodoxy — although they do not — but that they reject the authority of the Orthodox. Orthodoxy can tolerate deviance when it is so recognized by the actor; what it cannot tolerate is the legitimization of what it considers to be deviance through the rejection of the authority of its rabbis.³²

For the philosophical Modern Orthodox, however, matters are much more complex. First of all, even if they do not challenge the halakhic authority of the sectarian elite — and they do so at times — there are those specific areas in which they overtly challenge them philosophically. The Modern Orthodox are, therefore, villified and shunned by the sectarian community.

Above and beyond the specific issues on which they challenge the sectarians, the Modern Orthodox, being modern, are at least suspicious of the very notion of human beings with virtually complete authority. In addition, their study of halakhah reinforces the Orthodox Jewish rationalist priority of truth over authority.³³ This further inhibits Mod-

29. Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City, NY, 1979), p. 27.

30. This is one interpretation of the verse, “*Lo tukhal lehit’alem*” (“You will not be able to avoid it”), (Deuteronomy 22:3).

31. See Breuer, *Edah Udyuknah*, for evidence of a similar situation in nineteenth century Germany.

32. Cf., David Ellenson, *Tradition in Transition* (Lanham, MD, 1989).

33. Cf., Norman Lamm, *Torah Umadda*, pp.100–102.

ern Orthodoxy from becoming a real movement, because a movement would entail organization and authority to a degree which goes against the very grain of philosophical moderns. Perhaps there is a suspicion that becoming a movement would entail a version of Robert Michels' "iron law of oligarchy," that is, that a real movement would entail organization, and "he who says organization says oligarchy."³⁴ But Modern Orthodoxy, being philosophically modern, emphasizes a measure of personal autonomy as well as rationalist truth. The Modern Orthodox reject oligarchy just as they are skeptical of all human authority, which may be one reason why they have no "Council of Torah Sages,"³⁵ as the sectarians do.

On the other hand, some Modern Orthodox rabbis experience a need for acceptance by the "world of the Yeshiva,"³⁶ which is the core of the traditional sectarian community. Since stringency, punctiliousness, and zealousness in ritual observance are the prescribed norm in that world,³⁷ those Modern Orthodox rabbis who seek the approval of the yeshiva world may likewise adopt stringent stances and, in the process, lose the support of precisely that Modern Orthodox group which they sought to lead.

Finally, although the analysis has by no means been exhausted, the ability of Modern Orthodoxy to attract a large following and become a movement is inherently inhibited by the fact that it is highly rational and intellectual. This, alone, would limit its attraction, since it has built-in tensions and frequently requires conscious living with inconsistency. As Sol Roth writes with respect to synthesis, "The task of realizing synthesis in personality is a very difficult affair, primarily because it requires the development of an attitude that enables an individual to adopt different perspectives."³⁸

Also, the very fact that Modern Orthodoxy is much more open, severely limits its attractiveness for most people. For better or worse, most people prefer, if not demand, very specific, black-or-white con-

34. Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York, 1962).

35. Cf., Jonathan Sacks' observations as to why Modern Orthodoxy rejects the manner in which the slogan, "*daas Torah*" ("Torah opinion) is used by the sectarian community: . . . *daas Torah* in its modern sense tends to be opposed by many within Orthodoxy who see halakhah as a rational discipline operating in the empirical world, open to argument and counter-argument and the development of consensus. They also see the new charisma with which the yeshivah head has been invested, as subverting the traditional authority of the *mara d'atra*, the local rabbi.

(Jonathan Sacks, *Traditional Alternatives: Orthodoxy and the Future of the Jewish People* [London, 1989], p. 136).

36. William B. Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva: An Intimate Portrait of Orthodox Jewry* (New York, 1982).

37. For an analysis of the development of that whole process, see Chaim I. Waxman, "Toward a Sociology of *Psak*," *Tradition* 25 (no. 3, Spring 1991): 12-25.

38. Sol Roth, *The Jewish Idea of Community* (New York, 1977), p. 145.

cepts which can easily be differentiated from others. If an analogy may be permitted, they prefer either meat or dairy to *parve*, neutral or grey areas. As Mary Douglas suggests, "The yearning for rigidity is in us all. It is part of our human condition to long for hard lines and clear concepts."³⁹ Modern Orthodoxy, in both its content and its structure, does not have the "hard lines and clear concepts" as does sectarian Orthodoxy.

Moreover, being predominantly cerebral, it has limited potential for attracting the masses. Social movements, in general, and religious movements probably even more so, are built on emotional, passionate commitment, and an ability to radiate a strong sense of family-like, communal warmth. The somewhat-distant intellectual coolness of the philosophical Modern Orthodox is much less amenable to being translated into a movement which generates warmth and devotion. For the same reasons, it is difficult to establish primary and secondary schools capable of socializing children to this type of Modern Orthodoxy.

In light of all of the above, it may be concluded that Schwab is actually correct in his assertion that Hirsch should not be viewed as the father of Modern Orthodoxy. At the same time, in order to enhance Hirsch's status within the sectarian community — as the Rabbi of the community which defines itself as the contemporary Hirschian community — Schwab had to engage in a degree of revisionism with respect to Hirsch's positive approach to modernity. As to the accuracy of his portrayal of Hirsch and, ultimately, Schwab's assessment of Modern Orthodoxy, they can probably be judged in light of his own notions of true history. From his perspective,

What ethical purpose is served by preserving a realistic historic picture? We should tell ourselves and our children the good memories of the good people, their unshakeable faith, their staunch defense of tradition, their life of truth, their impeccable honesty, their boundless charity and their great reverence for Torah and Torah sages. What is gained by pointing out their inadequacies and their contradictions? We want to be inspired by their example and learn from their experience . . . Rather than write the history of our forebears, every generation has to put a veil over the human failings of its elders and glorify all the rest which is great and beautiful. That means we have to do without a real history book. We can do without. We do not need realism, we need *inspiration* from our forefathers in order to pass it on to posterity.⁴⁰

39. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 1984), p. 162.

40. Rav Shimon Schwab, *Selected Writings* (Lakewood, NJ, 1988), pp. 233–234. This quotation was first brought to my attention by Jacob J. Schacter, in his article, "Haskalah, Secular Studies and the Close of the Yeshiva in Volozhin in 1892," *Torah U-Madda Journal*, Vol. 2, 1990: 111.

The Real Test of the Akedah: Blind Obedience Versus Moral Choice

LIPPMAN BODOFF

I

GENESIS 22:1–19 RECOUNTS THE STORY OF the binding of Isaac, known as the *Akedah*. The traditional interpretation is that God tested, *nisah* (Gen. 22:1), Abraham by commanding him to slaughter his beloved son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah. Abraham was about to sacrifice the boy on the altar when an angel called out to him to stop, “because now I see that you are a God-fearing person and you would not withhold your son . . . from Me” (Gen. 22:12). Thereupon Abraham looked about and saw a ram, which he sacrificed in Isaac’s place, calling the place “where God will be seen.” A second angelic voice then swears in God’s name to bless Abraham by multiplying his seed (22:17).¹

In the traditional understanding of this story, God never intended for Abraham to slaughter Isaac, because it was wrong — as we know from the end of the story when Abraham is told to desist. Abraham, on the other hand, out of fear of God, was willing to violate God’s moral law against murder,² to which Abraham was committed, as we know by virtue of the earlier discussion between Abraham and God about the immorality of killing even ten innocent or righteous people who might live in Sodom and Gomorrah: “*Hashofet kol ha’arez lo ya’asseh mishpat?*” “Will the Ruler of the universe not do justice?” (Gen. 18:25).

The message of the end of the *Akedah* is quite plainly that God does not want even his God-fearing adherents to go so far as to murder in God’s name or even at God’s command. Implicitly, we are being told, God will never ask for this proof of loyalty or fear of God again. He asked it only of Abraham, the first Jew, the first forefather of the Jewish people, to demonstrate Abraham’s boundless fear of God. How far Jews must be willing to go in demonstrating their faith is not to be learned from the *Akedah* but from specific rules promulgated by our Sages over the centuries in interpreting the Torah.³ Clearly, Abraham is to be emulated for his fear of God, but not for the lengths to which he was willing to go to prove it. (In fact, some later traditions and uses of the *Akedah* “lesson” may be problematic.)⁴

LIPPMAN BODOFF is Associate Editor of *JUDAISM Magazine*.

II

Because Abraham is praised for being prepared to do what we may not do, and because God, the source of all morality, asked Abraham to do what no moral person before or since should ever contemplate, and expected Abraham to obey, the *Akedah* has remained one of the most difficult texts in Tanakh to understand, justify and transmit to new generations.

In the spirit of *shiv'im panim la-Torah* (the Torah has seventy, i.e., many facets), I would like to suggest the possible existence of a remarkable, coded, counter-message in the *Akedah*, that exists in parallel with the traditional meaning of the text — which has always been accepted but never fully understood. Specifically, I propose, first, that God was testing Abraham's willingness to *refuse* to commit murder even when commanded by God to do so; second, that Abraham went along with that command with faith that — in the end — he would not be required to do so, and *not* with the zealous intent to consummate Isaac's murder, although he was prepared, in the end, to resist the command to kill his son if he had to; and third, that Abraham was rewarded for his moral stance, and his faith that God really does not need or want child sacrifice, or any violations of His moral law, to prove man's love or fear of God. This view of the *Akedah* is consistent with fundamentals of Jewish law and philosophy.

For example, we do not pay attention to heavenly voices or signs on matters of Jewish law;⁵ murder is one of the three sins which one should refrain from committing even at the cost of one's own life;⁶ the inquiry concerning a false prophet is not simply whether God has spoken to him or her, but whether the prophet commands the violation of Jewish law;⁷ and worthy ends never justify anti-halakhic means except when the halakhah itself — through the rule of *hora'at sha-ah* — gives the Sages (and prophets) the authority temporarily to set aside a law when special circumstances threaten the halakhah.⁸ Finally, we are supposed to emulate God in our actions, *ma hu, af ata*;⁹ thus, "Just as God is compassionate, so you [man] must be compassionate." Similarly, we must emulate our forefathers: "*Ma'asse avot, siman le-banim*." Yet, one of the quintessential statements of the traditional view of Abraham's greatness at the *Akedah* is found in the *Zikhronot* section of the *musaf* service on Rosh Hashanah, where he is described as having "*suppressed* his compassion to do Thy will ...!"¹⁰ (emphasis added). Is *this* what we should learn?

Some of the more novel interpretations or homiletics of the *Akedah* exacerbate the problematic nature of its traditional interpretation. Ramban and Rashi tell us how morally difficult God made it for Abraham by emphasizing the details of the command.¹¹ Saadia tells us that the moral of the story is that Jews should be ready to sacrifice their lives for the sanctification of God's name, seemingly overlooking the fact that the traditional interpretation of the *Akedah* requires murder, not to sanctify God's

name in the accepted sense of *adhering* to God's Commandments, but in the sense of *violating* those Commandments, including the fundamental precept of "be killed rather than kill another without proper cause."¹² Rambam says that God knew that Abraham would pass the test,¹³ which is consistent with Rambam's view of a philosophic, all-knowing God; but this confidence, shared by the Ramban,¹⁴ does nothing to eliminate the problem of Abraham being tested based on his willingness, through faith and fear, to commit one of the three most heinous crimes in Jewish law. Franz Rosenzweig says¹⁵ that we and Abraham cannot and could not understand God's true purpose. Perhaps; but are we to understand that we must suspend our moral judgment when a holy person or a divine voice, or a prophet says: "Violate the halakhah?" That may be Rosenzweig's Judaism but it is hardly authentic (see Part III). There is an interpretation of the text that says that Abraham misunderstood God, who never intended a real sacrifice.¹⁶ Then what did God intend, and how does Abraham's willingness to slaughter Isaac make Abraham great? There is another interpretation¹⁷ that says that killing one's child was not known to be clearly wrong in Abraham's time, which is strange, given Abraham's concern about killing the righteous in the earlier story of Sodom and Gomorrah. And, if killing was not known to be wrong, in what sense was the *Akedah* the ultimate test of Abraham's faith? Elie Wiesel's view is that God was wrong for asking, and Abraham for agreeing — which does nothing to make the text Jewishly palatable; quite the contrary. For one eminent world historian, the *Akedah* makes "perfect sense" because Abraham's "covenant with God was of such transcendent enormity that it demanded [of Abraham] something more [than animal sacrifice]: a sacrifice of the best loved in the fullest sense . . ."¹⁸ But transcendence should involve greater morality, not the greatest immorality.

In my midrashic view of the *Akedah*, it is a morality tale of Abraham's staunch defense of God's moral law against any temptation — even God's command — to violate it. It established Judaism's unique insight, among ancient religions, cults and cultures, about the dangers of having human beings submit to the orders of individuals who claimed unique access to the wishes of "the Gods," or of any God, and who might be forced, through ignorance and fear, to submit to a cultic elite that, by its unique power and authority, could reign unchecked in human affairs and make man a moral slave. Judaism, alone, sought to make man morally free, and, to do so, it had to eliminate societal arrangements in which the majority were forced to accept the word of the few, as revealed only to them, as expressing God's wish, without any limitations or constraints to assure their authenticity and consistency with God's moral design of the world.

The corrective was a religion based on a covenant between God and *all* of the people, in a revealed text to which *all* had access and which *all* could master, and the stipulation (with rare exceptions, discussed in Part III) that no one, claiming to hear God's message directly and privately,

could require anyone in the covenantal community to violate the text, as understood by the judges and sages of the people with the authority to interpret and apply that covenantal text. God's word was revealed and written. Its interpretation, by a holy, learned, covenantal community and its leaders, could be oral, but also had to be open. This jurisprudential structure assured that no person or elite could misguide the people down paths of immorality in the name of a supernatural power. (It may be significant if, as some believe, the invention of the alphabet [i.e., the original, Semitic one] occurred in Canaan circa the 18th century B.C.E., during Abraham's era, which broke the monopoly on knowledge previously enjoyed by society's ruling elites, allowing literacy to spread to ordinary people.) Thus, the Bible literally, and openly, commands parents to kill a "rebellious son," but that text has been so hedged about by publicly discussed and developed rabbinic exegesis, that the Talmud categorically states that, in juridical law, such a "rebellious son" never was found to exist.¹⁹ One can imagine the much different results if such a law arose in a religion based on God's private revelations to a holy person.

III

Before examining the *Akedah* text to see if it supports the hidden midrashic interpretation that I propose, we need to answer two questions: first, is the traditional view of the *Akedah* any different from accepting, as God's will, a volcano that kills 10,000 people, including many who, in any halakhic sense, do not deserve to die? Second, aren't true prophets bound to agree to *any* Divine commands, and aren't all Jews bound to accept such prophetic messages? Aren't all such prophecies, *per se*, moral and consistent with Torah law?

Both questions can be answered simultaneously. Natural or miraculous acts of God should, indeed, be accepted as God's will without undermining a Jew's faith (Job 40:8), as difficult as this may be because of the event's personal impact or enormity.²⁰ We accept the acts of the *Dayan Emet* (the Judge of Truth) in this world, when humans are not asked to participate or evaluate God's actions; no halakhic issues are thereby involved. However, when humans are involved, the halakhah takes over, and man must exercise moral responsibility. The traditional view of the *Akedah* raises halakhic difficulties.

There are two issues to be distinguished. The first is: may a prophet object if he is told by God to do something, or told about God's plan to do something, that seems to be inconsistent with God's justice or compassion? The second is: what should Jews, including the prophet, *do* if instructed in God's name to participate in a violation of God's law?

In the first case, we have a number of examples. Abraham was told about God's plan to destroy Sodom, and objected, in contrast to Noah, whom our Sages criticize for not speaking up when God announced His

plan to destroy the world by the Flood. Moses was told about God's plan to destroy the Jewish people and start a new nation from Moses' progeny, after the sin of the Golden Calf, and he is praised by our Sages because he objected. In Jewish tradition, a prophet's conscientious objection to a Divine plan or order is praise-worthy; it is not rare to find prophets who resist their Divine appointment and task. Jonah, who did more than question, but sought to escape his appointment even if he could not persuade God to relieve him of it, is considered a *kovesh et nevi'ato*, one who suppresses his prophecy, and is, thereby, subject to Divine punishment.²¹ Therefore, we cannot justify Abraham's refusal to at least protest God's command that he kill Isaac on the grounds that prophets must *silently* obey whenever commanded or consulted by God. The opposite is true when God's justice or compassion are in issue. Moreover, as we shall see, even a true prophet may sometimes have to question the authenticity of his vision.²²

Jewish law is similar in the second case. A Jew is generally not required to obey what appear to be Divine commands to violate the law. There are certainly cases, *consistent with Jewish law*, where Jews were required to obey Divine commands, through prophets, to cause enemies of Israel to be killed, as in the case of Samuel and Saul regarding Agag.²³ But the Talmud states that a command by a prophet in God's name to *uproot* God's law should not be obeyed. This raises questions about Abraham's and Isaac's willingness to participate in the *Akedah*.²⁴ Rambam — based on the distinction made between “uprooting” and “suspending” the law, and the opinion of R. Abahu,²⁵ summarizing the Talmud's discussion — asserts that there is a *hora'at sha'ah* exception for true prophets who order the violation of God's law in God's name in special, temporary cases, which Jews should obey unless ordered to commit idolatry.²⁶ Radbaz, three centuries after Rambam, still displays perplexity over whether we should obey a prophet who orders a violation of God's law involving relations between persons (e.g., murder); he concludes that a prophet should be obeyed even if he orders a violation of the Torah if his purpose is to protect the Torah, in those special circumstances where following the requirements of Torah law would lead to the undermining of Torah itself.²⁷ The paradigm is Elijah at Mt. Carmel, where — to uproot idolatry — he brought sacrifices outside of the Temple, contrary to Jewish law, to demonstrate to the people that God was supreme over the various idols which so many Israelites continued to worship.

In light of this discussion, the *Akedah* is plainly not a case of violating the law to save the law, as required by *hora'at sha'ah*. (Indeed, if it were deemed such a case, it would represent an act of extreme *practicality* rather than an act of supreme *faith*!). Therefore, the traditional interpretation of the *Akedah* assumes that Abraham (and Isaac) acted contrary to the halakhah, which prohibits murder, the obedience of prophets to heavenly

commands to commit murder, and the compliance of others with prophetic transmissions of such commands.

Abraham was not ignorant of God's prohibition against murder, known since God's response to Cain's murder of Abel (Gen. 4:8–12) and the Divine Noahide laws (Gen. 9:1–17; *Ex. R.* 27:9). Recall Abraham's challenge to God for planning to destroy Sodom if any righteous persons lived there, and God's praise of Abraham after his death for his complete obedience to God's "commandments, statutes and laws" (Gen. 26:5). Thus, if he was not familiar with the law of *hora'at sha'ah*, there was no halakhic basis for killing Isaac, even by Divine Command. If he was familiar with it, he knew the *limited* exception to the Divine law against murder that it provides. I believe that it is far more likely that he was fully familiar with the law (B. *Yoma* 28b), not only because of the sweeping character of God's praise of Abraham noted above, but because the purpose of the limited scope of *hora'at sha'ah* is to protect the Jewish people and Jewish law from the imagined or improperly understood messages of true prophets, and the falsified messages of false ones. (For this reason, even true prophets cannot prophetically add to Jewish law.)²⁸ Surely Abraham — who first found God and became the first prophet of the Jewish people — was sensitive to these common sense concerns, which are so essential to protecting God's moral law and which, ultimately, were formally incorporated in the halakhah. This was Abraham's tenth and final test, and we should embrace the chance to know that he passed it.

To sum up, there is no doctrine or belief in Judaism that whatever God tells a prophet to do, or instruct others to do, even if it requires a violation of God's law, must be obeyed without any prior discussion or objection, and we adhere to a Divine command to commit such a violation only in situations of *hora'at sha'ah*, i.e., when necessary to protect the Torah, or the Jewish people (*Esther R.* 4:16). But if the *Akedah* is not a case of *hora'at sha'ah*, and if the halakhah did not prevent Abraham from challenging God's command to violate Divine moral law, how can we interpret the *Akedah* in a way that is consistent with Jewish law? What does the *Akedah* teach us?

IV

I believe that there is a coded counter-message in the *Akedah*, which provides a simultaneous and necessary conceptual theological balance to the awesome mystery and the daunting problematics of the traditional interpretation. On the one hand, God was testing Abraham to see if he would remain loyal to God's revealed moral law even if ordered to abandon it. We know this because an earlier text expressly says that God wanted Abraham always to do what is "just and right" and to teach his children to follow this Divine path (Gen. 18:19). On the other hand, Abraham never intended to kill Isaac, and was terribly concerned at the fact that God

had commanded him to do so. Abraham was testing the Almighty, as it were, as to what kind of covenant and religion he, Abraham, was being asked to join. Was it one that required man to follow heavenly voices to any length, even to immorality? Or was God, Himself, subject to the requirements of justice and righteousness, as Divinely defined and known, as Abraham had already indicated in his debate with God about the proposed destruction of Sodom and Gemorrah.²⁹

After all, it was Abraham who found God, not the other way around,³⁰ and it is not surprising that he had certain moral expectations — and perhaps even requirements — of the all-powerful God of the ordered universe, Whose tradition he had received and studied, and in Whose Name he was about to establish a new, world religion.

In testing God, as it were, Abraham was, ultimately, testing himself. “I have found God,” he seems to be saying, “and my tradition and experience have revealed Him and made Him known to me as an all-powerful, all-knowing, just and compassionate God. But I need to be sure that this is the God to which I truly wish to dedicate myself and my progeny and my followers for all time. If the God I have found demands the same kind of immorality that I saw in my father’s pagan society, I must be mistaken. I must look further. To obey such a God is not a moral advance at all.” To paraphrase our Sages, “better observance without God than God without observance.”³¹

It may be asked why Abraham did not challenge God at the outset, when first commanded to sacrifice Isaac, as he did when he learned of God’s determination to wipe out Sodom and Gemorrah. Indeed, challenge is necessary when it is God who is preparing to do something, as with Sodom, because God is in control of what He is about to do. But whenever one is asked to do something wrong by someone else — in the case of the *Akedah*, Abraham by God — there is an alternative strategy: stalling for time, whose exemplar (apart from Abraham) is Aaron in dealing with the Israelite demand for a Divine incarnation to worship (the golden calf).³² As everyone familiar with the practice of a bureaucracy knows, those who seek simultaneously to obey their superiors — whom they admire, respect and sometimes fear — *and* give their superiors a chance to change their minds about what seems to be an unwise or immoral idea, rarely challenge the idea head on. They stretch things out, find problems at various steps of the way, move papers from one office to another, consult experts and conduct meetings to consider the various aspects. There are two things that they don’t do: they don’t tell their boss that his or her proposal is a bad idea — in the hope that the boss will decide that way, eventually; and they don’t agree that the boss’s proposal is a good idea and rush off intending to obey it — if they think that the idea is bad. The strategic objective is to keep faith with one’s conscience, give the boss a chance to make the smart or moral decision in the long run, and make the bureaucracy

look good — obedient — throughout. Similar behavior may be predicted among loved ones.

The matter may be compared to a father who asks his son to violate the Sabbath in some way. The child does not know whether the father is testing his obedience to the law — which requires him to resist his father and observe the Shabbat commandments³³ — or is testing the child's love (and fear) of the parent. The child can protest immediately, perhaps thereby showing disrespect and causing the parent anguish, or the child can make the necessary preparations to do what the parent has requested, seeming to go along with it, in the hope or expectation that the child's knowledge and obedience of the law is being tested, not its parental obedience, thus saving the need to object to the very end, when the actual consummation of the act that will violate the Sabbath is to occur, but confident that the parent will never let the child take the last step.³⁴

Which approach is the more praiseworthy? The Bible gives the child the right to defy its parent, but never tells us how. Clearly, the more respectful, less insulting way, which also preserves the paramount nature of the Sabbath, is to stall, and give the parent the time and the opportunity to countermand the improper order.³⁵

As we shall see, this is precisely what the texts tells us that Abraham did.³⁶ He did not rush — he stalled! He broke up the task that he was given into numerous tasks, or steps, and at each one he stopped, waiting to see whether “the Boss” had reconsidered. It was never Abraham's intention to kill his son, and God never indicated whether He wanted Abraham to kill Isaac, or if He wanted Abraham to refuse to do so. Given Abraham's moral purity, we may reasonably conclude that if, at the very end, God had not rescinded His command for Isaac's death, Abraham would have rejected the command, chosen the moral course of not committing murder, and saved his son — and then been forced to re-examine the prospects of his new religion, and the belief and faith on which it rested. Abraham was waiting for God to say: “Don't do it.” Moreover, as we shall see, there is good reason to believe that God was waiting for Abraham to say: “I can't do it; it is contrary to Your moral law.”³⁷

The text can be interpreted to show Abraham stalling. It does not show Abraham leaping from receipt of God's command to his execution of it. *Indeed, Abraham never agrees to accept it and perform it.*³⁸ Instead, the text describes Abraham going through a series of separate steps: first he gets up, then he dresses his animals, then he gets his retinue in order, then he gets the rope, and the wood, and then he sets off, and then he sees Mount Moriah, and then he gets off the animal, and then he instructs his retinue to wait, and then he and Isaac *walk (vayelkhu)*, but *don't run*, toward Moriah, and then there is a conversation, and then the various distinct preparations of the altar, and then he stretches out his arm, and then, finally, he takes the knife. Does this plodding, detailed sequence of steps connote a man rushing off to do God's bidding? Hardly.

The point of the text is quite clear. At each step Abraham was waiting for God to evidence a change of mind, to withdraw His command; when that was not forthcoming, Abraham took the next step, and put the Almighty to the next test — as it were — always showing obedience, always *giving God the opportunity* to make the moral statement that God does not want man to murder or to commit other immoral acts in God's name. And, at the very end, when Abraham took the last step before he would have been forced by his conscience to stop and challenge God's command, the angelic order to stop finally came.

The traditional view that, until ordered to desist, Abraham intended to kill Isaac as God commanded, thus meriting great reward, is not held unreservedly in the Midrash. Thus, as noted above, some commentators observe that Abraham misunderstood God's command; others, that Abraham and Isaac had doubts, and were tempted to disobey it.³⁹ Moreover, if the command was ambiguous, wherein lies the test and Abraham's merit in his willingness to kill Isaac? For, if that is not clearly what God commanded, there is plainly nothing praiseworthy in Abraham's willingness to do such a thing. Under such circumstances it would be, at best, misguided zeal. The midrash that interprets Abraham's promise to his retinue, in Gen. 22:5, that "*we* [Isaac and I] will pray and [*we*] will return to you" as indicating that Abraham then knew, through a spirit of prophecy, that he would not have to kill Isaac, further supports the view that, at least from that point, Abraham had no such intention.⁴⁰

Those who argue that Abraham intended to kill Isaac before being stopped, cannot prove it from the *Akedah*, because Abraham never agreed to kill his son, and never had to. Had he done so, and said "I still believe in God," we would have had proof. We would also have had a religion to which few and, perhaps, none of us could subscribe, because such a religion would never have endured. Those who argue that Abraham met the test, by virtue of his intent up to the last moment to kill Isaac, argue that God knew what was in Abraham's heart, that God gave Abraham a chance, through all the steps enumerated in the story, to change his mind, but Abraham was willing to obey to the very end.⁴¹ Therefore, God — knowing this — could suspend the order to kill Isaac and, thereby, prevent what would have been an unjustified murder at the last moment. Unfortunately, this approach simply mires us even further in an interpretation of the *Akedah* in which God expects his followers to obey His commands whenever they believe that is what God wants — even if the command is to perform — without halakhic justification — an unequivocally immoral act, one that is totally contrary to fundamental Jewish law.⁴²

But how shall we interpret the statement at Gen. 22:12: "For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from me." One answer is that God did not know what Abraham would have done had the heavenly voice not called out to him to stop; all He knew was what Abraham had done up to then. We each have moral

free will, and Judaism does not require acceptance of the idea that God knew in advance that Abraham would choose to slaughter his son. This philosophical problem has long been debated in Judaism. For Gersonides and Ibn Daud, for example, Abraham had free will to the very end on whether or not to kill Isaac, and his decision could not be known — even by God — until he actually made it by bringing down the knife on his son's body.⁴³

But, apart from this theological rationale, I believe that a close reading of the text permits a midrashic interpretation along the following lines: God was testing Abraham to see if he would remain faithful to His revealed moral law even when Divinely commanded to violate it, in order fully and finally to expunge the belief and practice of child sacrifice, or any murder, (ostensibly) in God's name or for God's benefit. Abraham never intended to kill Isaac but was determined to stall, with faith in God's morality and a determination to uphold it. God was waiting for Abraham to say, "I won't do it," and Abraham was waiting for God to say, "Stop, don't do it, I didn't mean it." The command for Abraham to desist comes. However, while the original command to kill Isaac came from God, the command that he spare him, because "now I know that you did not intend to withhold your son . . . from me," *is not made by God but by an angel of God.*⁴⁴ I submit that this change is crucial to a full, deep understanding of what occurred because, in Jewish belief, angels, unlike God, can have no foreknowledge of man's moral choices.⁴⁵ *The text, therefore, could not attribute to God the knowledge of Abraham's intent to kill Isaac and, therefore, did not do so, because God, who does know what is in man's heart, knew that Abraham had no such intention!*

Actually, there are two reasons why we are not required to credit the angelic statements (Gen. 22:12 and 16) that Abraham intended to kill Isaac. First, angels are not competent to know the intentions of human beings. They are purely mechanical in their perceptions; seeing (and hearing), for them, is believing. They unquestionably obey commands, and mechanically can observe acts of obedience or disobedience to commands. No angelic Sanhedrin would disobey Divine messages about the halakhah, as our Sages did.⁴⁶ They can also make prophecies and promises in God's name, as commanded. But they do not understand what is in the human heart. Only God is a *bohen kelayot valev*, one who understands what is in the innermost part of man's heart and the secret recesses of his mind.⁴⁷ What they see is what they know, or can reason about, and all they could see was Abraham seemingly executing God's command, step by step.⁴⁸ Second, angels are never given more than one task at a time.⁴⁹ In this case, the first angel's task was to order Abraham to stop, and not take the final step that would consummate the slaughter of Isaac. The task of the second angel (necessarily a second angel because of the second task involved) was to promise Abraham that God would multiply his seed. Thus, the added statement that each angel made that Abraham intended

to kill Isaac (to justify, first, the order to desist, and, second, the promise of God's blessing), was also defective because, in each case, this observation went beyond the task that the angel was empowered by God to perform.

The incapacity of angels to know that is in the human heart may be deduced in a number of ways:⁵⁰

1. To God, and not to angels, is universally attributed the power of knowing man's heart and mind. This is particularly evident in the liturgy. There is, also, the text in Genesis in which God turns to the angels and asserts that *He* (not they) knows or understands Abraham's intentions: *Ki yedativ et asher yezaveh* ("Because I know that he will command. . . ." (Gen. 18:19).⁵¹

2. Man's understanding is equated to that of the angels. If angels could know the secrets of man's heart and mind, then — under this equation — man would have that power as well, which is clearly not the case. Indeed, the Bible chastises any belief in such human powers.⁵²

3. Angels insist on strict observance of God's commands, having the quality of justice but not of compassion. This is because angels have no evil inclination, so that they cannot empathize with a person's moral dilemmas and wrong moral choices.⁵³

4. The angels opposed man's creation, and oppose his repentance from sin.⁵⁴ Repentance requires an internalized resolution to abandon forever the sin that was committed. Angels, being pure goodness and lacking a bad inclination, manifestly cannot know whether or not a sincere "return" has taken place.⁵⁵

5. The Sages say that God's power to know man's heart means both parts of man's heart: one consists of the good inclination and the other of the bad inclination. It is logically impossible that angels, who have only the good inclination, can know man's heart, which consists of both.⁵⁶

6. Angels understand only Hebrew, *lashon ha'kodesh* (the "holy tongue"). But, if they can understand what man intends, what is in man's heart and mind, why can't they understand man's prayers in any language?⁵⁷

The use of an angel to rescind God's command makes two important points. First, it tells us, or confirms for us, that Abraham never intended to kill Isaac, which is why *God* could not say that Abraham did so intend. Second, it draws a dramatic contrast between Abraham, representing a paradigm for mankind, and angels. For the angels, the test of the *Akedah* was the test that angels pass every day — to give God mechanical, unquestioning, obedience. This is one meaning of the legends of Satan and the angels — each, perhaps, with different motives — asking God to test Abraham with the *Akedah*.⁵⁸ The angels wanted to see if Abraham would unquestioningly obey God's commands, which would make Abraham as one of them; for them, God's command — once given — had to be obeyed, and Abraham — as far as he was allowed to go — passed this test, as far

as they could see. Thus, the twin angelic observations: “and you did not withhold your son, your only son” (Gen. 22:12 and 16).

But the Almighty had a completely different test in mind — a test that would make sure that Abraham would not unquestioningly obey commands — even Heavenly commands — to commit immoral acts. In Jewish thought, man is not intended to be like the angels, but to exercise his free will to obey God’s revealed moral law, indeed, all of God’s revealed law, as interpreted by an educated, morally sensitized, pious, religious community. What God did not want, and does not want, is human beings who are prepared to commit acts which they know to be immoral just because a holy man has received a private communication from on high. The religion that Abraham and God agreed to at Moriah is the religion of a revealed God, a God who is revealed to all, and not privately, and Whose Law is similarly revealed, as Yehuda Halevi understood,⁵⁹ in a written text, publicly available for scrutiny, study and acceptance by all, and subject to subsequent interpretation and application — not on the basis of private, esoteric orders to a select few from Heaven, but the understanding of a religious community based on continuing study and piety.

There is one last textual problem to solve. In Gen. 22:15–18 we read the *second* angelic observation of Abraham’s intent:

15. And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16. and said: “*By Myself have I sworn, says the Lord, that, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17. that I will indeed bless you and I will indeed multiply your progeny . . . 18 . . . because you listened to my voice.*” (emphasis added)

Isn’t it clearly God, and not an angel, saying here that Abraham intended to kill Isaac? I believe that the text can be read, midrashically, otherwise. The words, “By Myself have I sworn, says the Lord,” at the *beginning* of verse 16, relate to the blessings in verses 17–18; God swears, as it were, that He will greatly multiply Abraham’s seed. The concept of God swearing has no relevance to the intervening statement at the *end* of verse 16, “that because you . . . have not withheld your son . . .” This is not a fact about which one swears. I suggest, therefore, that it is an angelic interpolation. Significantly, the angel here mechanically repeats the same observation about Abraham’s intent to kill Isaac that was mechanically made by the first angel, *without* invoking the authority of God, when ordering Abraham not to harm Isaac (verse 12).

A stronger reason for considering the second statement, “because you have not withheld your son,” as an angelic interpolation, and not as God’s view of Abraham’s intent, is *redundancy*. That statement is offered (Gen. 22:16) as the reason for God’s blessing of Abraham (Gen. 22:17), but the same reason seems to be offered again immediately after the blessing (22:18): “*eykev . . .*,” “because you listened to My voice.” But the Torah is never superfluous; therefore, a different reason is evidently intended by the *eykev* formula, representing the Divine and *not* the angelic view —

namely, “because you never intended to violate My moral law.” Further support for this view can be ascertained from Gen. 26:5, where God repeats, for Isaac, His earlier blessing to Abraham to multiply his seed, using exactly the same reason, exactly the same verbal formula, as is used at the *Akedah* after His blessing of Abraham: “*eykev . . .*” — “because Abraham listened to My voice.” However, to Isaac, *God explains the meaning of the eykev formula*: “and he [Abraham] kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.” The commentators generally agree that this statement includes such basic commandments as the prohibition against murder, etc., *which would be plainly violated by the slaughter of Isaac*. Although some believe that 26:5 includes a reference to the *Akedah*, the *Targum Onkelos*, the authoritative, Aramaic translation of the Torah, interprets this text as referring to Abraham’s *obedience* to God’s moral and other commandments, and the rabbinic “fences” surrounding them, *and not to Abraham’s intent to disobey them by killing Isaac*.⁶⁰

Moreover, if the highpoint of the *Akedah* was Abraham’s willingness, even eagerness, to kill Isaac, his announcement that on this “mountain of God” his descendants would in the future build a temple to worship Abraham’s commanding God (22:14) (as commentators, e.g., *The Targum* and Rashi, understand this verse) would have come when he was about to kill Isaac. Instead, it comes after he is told to spare Isaac — suggesting that it was only then that Abraham accepted the charge to become the father of the nation that would spread God’s name and word throughout the world — a God who now revealed and proclaimed Himself as a God of compassion and morality, who did not require or desire of His faithful total moral surrender and intellectual submission as proof of their loyalty and faith, but wished them to do what is “just and right” (Gen. 18:19).

When we read, and listen, to the end of the *Akedah* text, we should hear two voices, God’s and that of the angels. God’s voice is saying, “Stop, I promise to reward you for being staunch in observing my Commandments, including the Commandment not to kill — you passed the test; I wanted to be sure you were not an immoral, mechanical, ‘Yes’ man;” and the other voice, that of the angels, who would know about Abraham only what they saw, because they are, in their nature, without ability to know what is in the human heart and mind. Thus, they were applauding Abraham for having the very opposite intention from that for which God was rewarding him, because that is what they would have done in Abraham’s place had they been similarly ordered and tested.

V

Even if we assume that it was God speaking through the angels on both occasions, there is another, simpler interpretation of the *Akedah* that rejects any intention by Abraham to kill Isaac, but accepts Abraham’s actions, as far as they went, as reflecting his faith in God — specifically, faith

in a God who does not want human sacrifice or murder of any kind, and Who would rescind His command rather than permit such an act even when it was Divinely commanded. Abraham's faith was in a God of justice, righteousness and compassion,⁶¹ Who wants man to wage his mightiest struggle to the end that God's revealed moral law is made manifest in the world that God created. "Because you have done this thing, and did not withhold your son" (Gen. 22:18) does not say that Abraham intended to kill Isaac if God did not countermand His awesome command at the last moment. It says only that "you were willing to endure the confused agony of going ahead and acting in obedience to My command, to the very point of killing Isaac — with faith that I would never allow that to happen."⁶² We may understand this as the same kind of faith as that which the children of Israel had when they plunged into the waters of the Red Sea at God's command — not the serene faith that God wanted them to kill themselves and their families by drowning, and the zealous intention of doing so, but the confident faith that God would, somehow, save them and keep His redemptive promises to them. Such a faith demonstrated, as did Abraham's, that God is, indeed, a God of justice and righteousness and not a God who tests the faith of His followers by testing their willingness to kill themselves or their loved ones just because God asks it.

Abraham could have protested God's command to kill Isaac then and there, when God commanded it, and passed the test that God had in mind, of being staunch in his defense and observance of God's commandments — even at the risk of challenging God's commands. Indeed, out of compassion and love for his wife, Sarah, and his son, Isaac, Abraham surely felt the almost irresistible compulsion to speak out against God's command right away, and, in that way — knowing God's answer — sparing them the agony of seeing Abraham go forward in obedience to God's command — an agony that would cause Sarah's death and Isaac's alienation from him forever after.⁶³ Yet, Abraham refused this course. His faith in God's justice and righteousness allowed him to pursue an even nobler course. He did not want God's moral law against murder to be affirmed merely as a Divine response to a human plea, as occurred at Sodom, nor to be proclaimed merely as a response to human arguments about God's mercy, God's promises,⁶⁴ what the other nations will think, or even about God's justice and righteousness. To achieve this, Abraham had to have an enduring, unshakable faith in God's justice and righteousness, a faith that allowed him to proceed with the *Akedah*, not with the steadfast, zealous intent to kill Isaac, but with the steadfast, serene faith that God, *without the need for human pleas*, would ultimately pronounce for all, and for all time, the prohibition against murder — even for God's glory and in God's name.

If I am right, it is possible to understand in a new way the strange formulation of the *Akedah* in the Rosh Hashanah *musaf* liturgy. There, at the end of the *Zikhronot* section, we recall how Abraham "*suppressed his com-*

passion to do God's will with a full heart," and we ask God: "Similarly (sic) suppress your anger at us, *and deal compassionately with us*" (emphasis added). But why should God have compassion on us, if Abraham *suppressed* his compassion for Isaac in his determination to kill him? I suggest that the text may mean, simply, that Abraham suppressed his compassion for Sarah and Isaac by going along with God's command despite the agony that he knew this would cause them, so that God could manifest His abhorrence of murder *without having to be pressed to do so by human pleas*. Similarly (it is *now* possible to say), we ask God to suppress His anger and be compassionate with us, in the merit of Abraham who suppressed his feeling for his wife and child in order to demonstrate to the world his unshakable faith in God's justice and compassion.

In his determination not to kill Isaac, and his willingness to go forward with God's command until ordered to stop, Abraham passed the twin tests of the *Akedah*, the tests of the strongest moral courage, and the purest religious faith.

NOTES

1. For Rambam's classic discussion, see *The Guide for the Perplexed*, M. Friedlander, tr. (New York: Dover, 1956), Part III, Ch. XXIV, pp. 306–7.

2. Abraham's courage at the *Akedah* was precisely his willingness to do what he recognized was the morally heinous act of murder — dating back to God's punishment of Cain; the punishment of the Flood for acts of violence (Gen. 6:13 and Ramban, *ad. loc.* in his *Commentary on the Torah*, C. Chavel ed. [N.Y.: Shilo, 1971]); and the Noahide prohibition against murder at Gen. 9:6. As Rabbi J.H. Hertz comments on Gen. 22:12: "All that God desired was proof of Abraham's willingness to obey his command, and the moral surrender had been complete" (*The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* [London: Soncino Press, 1938]). According to the Talmud (B. *Yoma* 28b, citing Gen. 26:5) and many commentators (e.g., Ramban on Gen. 26:5; Rashi on 26:5 and 32:5; Albo, *Ikkarim*, Bk. 3, Ch. 10), Abraham, Isaac and Jacob fulfilled the Torah before it was given at Sinai and, surely, the prohibition of murder. Some believe that Jewish tradition recognizes a morality independent of Torah; see n.12 and authorities cited in Michael Harris, "The Shared Moral Universe of God and Man: A Re-reading of the *Akedah*," *L'Eylah*, September, 1992: 15–19. Cf. Walter Wurzburger, "Breuer and Kant," *Tradition* (Winter, 1992): 72. In the Midrash, even Satan warns Abraham that he dare not obey God's command to kill Isaac, citing the Noahide laws applicable to all mankind long before the Ten Commandments (B. *Sanhedrin* 89b; *Gen. R.* 56:4; see other citations in Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968], Vol. I, pp. 272–4). Shlomo Riskin says, citing Ramban, that "from the very beginning of the world there lived in Canaan believers in the One God, who had maintained the traditions of Adam and Noah, and whose king — Shem, son of Noah — was priest of God on high." (See "Abram: Finishing His Father's Journey," *Jerusalem Post*, Week Ending November 7, 1992, p. 23).

3. The halakhah deals with Divine commands to prophets to violate the halakhah (see Part III). Generally, the halakhah prohibits the violation of three commandments — murder, idolatry and incest — even if martyrdom results (Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Yesodei ha-Torah*, V: 1–5), although this rule was modified by the Jewish people in *extremis* (see H. Soloveitchik, "Religious Law and Change," *AJS Review*, Vol. XII, No. 2 [Fall 1987]: 208–17).

4. Thus, there is a remarkable legend that Abraham completed the sacrifice, and that Isaac was miraculously revived, although Ibn Ezra (on Gen. 22:19) rejects it. See

B. *Ta'anit* 16a and *Tosafot*, *ad loc.*, and the penitential prayer of Isaac b. Reuben Barceloni (1043) (referring to the "Ashes of Isaac"), in *Selichot for the Whole Year*, p. 337. Midrash *Da'at Zekenim* 8a states that Abraham wished he could have been permitted to complete the slaughter of Isaac, lest his failure to do so reflect badly on his desire to obey God's command. The Midrash also notes that Abraham resisted the order not to kill Isaac because it came only from an angel, whereas the command to sacrifice Isaac came from God (Abarbanel on Gen. 22:15; *Tanḥuma*, *Vayera* 23; *Tanḥuma* [Buber, ed.], 46, 114 ff; and Ginzberg, *Legends*, Vol. 1, p. 282). On whether Abraham actually did physically harm Isaac at the *Akedah* (and whether that tradition resulted from Christian influences), see Spiegel, pp. 3–8, 38, 43–59. See, also, Bruce Zuckerman, *Job the Silent* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), Ch. 2; *Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer* 31; and *Midrash Ha-Gadol* on Gen. 22:19.

The traditional view of the *Akedah* influenced the willingness of Ashkenazi Jews, as discussed by H. Soloveitchik, *Op. cit.*, to turn the Biblical prohibition against murder into an act that became recognized as a legitimate form of *kiddush ha-Shem*, when fathers killed their children and wives and then committed suicide rather than face forced baptism during the Crusades; it was "the paradigm and leitmotiv" of the chronicles of these events. See Y.H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), p. 38; see also Gerson D. Cohen, "Messianic Postures of Ashkenazim and Sephardim," *Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures* (Phila.: JPS, 1991), pp. 290–1, and notes 44–50; Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial*, Judah Goldin, tr. (N.Y.: Pantheon, 1967), ch. 3; the *piyyut* of Kalonymous b. Judah, *Amarti She'u Mini* (11th cent.), and the *piyyut* of Joseph of Chartres (12th cent.), *Elokim Be'alunu*, in *Kinot*, A. Rosenfeld, tr. and ann. (N.Y.: Judaica Press, 1979), pp. 140, 170; the *selihot* (penitential prayers) composed by Ephraim b. Isaac (12th century), Meir b. Isaac (11th century) and Benjamin b. Zerah (11th century), *Selichot for the Whole Year*, A. Rosenfeld, ann. and tr. (N.Y.: Judaica Press, 1978), pp. 204, 232, 320; David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse* (Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), p. 46 (14th century *kiddush ha-Shem*). More recently, the *Akedah* has inspired the modern conception (beginning around the turn of the century) of *Daas Torah* as "an expression of the ethic of submission," which is "viewed in hasidic sources [from which it originated] as a re-enactment of the *Akedah*, whereby the individual sacrifices his intellect on the altar of blind obedience to the words of the sages . . ." See Lawrence Kaplan, "Daas Torah: A Modern Conception of Rabbinic Authority," *The Orthodox Forum — Rabbinic Authority and Personal Autonomy*, Moshe Z. Sokol, ed. (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1992), pp. 54–5.

5. See, e.g., B. *Baba Mezi'ah* 59b; Mishnah, *Rosh Hashanah* 2:9; and the discussion in Eliezer Berkovits, *NOT IN HEAVEN: The Nature and Function of Halakha* (N.Y.: KTAV, 1983), Ch. 2, pp. 47–53.

6. See n. 3.

7. See discussion in Part III, below.

8. See, e.g., B. *Yevamot* 90b (*Tosafot*); B. *Avodah Zarah* 24b; B. *Yoma* 69b; 1 *Samuel* 6:14, and *Nehemiah* 8:4. In brief, this is a halakhic doctrine (*hora'at sha-ah*) used by the Sages for situations of unique significance. Its applicability to prophets who are Divinely commanded to act or command others to act, contrary to God's law, is discussed in Part III.

9. B. *Sotah* 14a; see also Hertz's discussion of this principle at Gen. 3:21, Ex. 33:19, and Lev. 19:2. See, also, *Reflections of the Rav*, adapted from the lectures of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik by A.R. Besdin (Jerusalem: WZO, 1979). Ch. II, pp. 23–30.

10. The suppression concept is midrashic, and not uniform; in some forms Abraham suppresses his compassion for Isaac — in others, his urge to argue with God (Spiegel, pp. 88–97). The Talmud is relatively quiet about the *Akedah*, favorably noting Abraham's arising early the morning after the command, to start his journey to Moriah — as an example for the diligent in observing God's commands; and the credit that subsequent generations receive for Abraham's binding of Isaac, as if they had done so (see Part V, n. 62), (B. *Rosh Hashanah* 16a, *San.* 89b and *Pes.* 4a). Scholars differ as to when the concept of Abraham suppressing his compassion became part of the *musaf* text. Spiegel

says (Ibid.) that it was probably some time during the period of the *Amoraim* (Talmudic sages between the 3rd and 6th centuries, C.E.). More recently, scholars believe that it was not part of a single, original integral text, but was added later (9th — 11th centuries) by the Geonim as part of their battle against the Karaites. See, e.g., Leon J. Liebrich, "Aspects of the New Year Liturgy," *HUCA* 34 (1963): 136–47; Naftali Widder, "Investigating Ancient Babylonian Practices," (Hebrew) *Tarbiz* 37 (1967–8): 135; Daniel Goldschmidt, *Mahzor LeYamim Nora'im* (Mahzor for the High Holidays), (N.Y.: Leo Baeck Institute, 1970) (Hebrew), Introduction, p. 29 and n.7; I.M. Elbogen, *The Historical Development of Prayer in Israel* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1972), p. 109; and Lawrence Hoffman, *The Canonization of the Synagogue Service* (South Bend: Notre Dame University Press, 1979), pp. 98–100. The current text of *Zikhronot*, including the *Akedah* material, is included in the 10th century mahzor of Saadia Gaon and in the liturgical compilation, *Seder of Amram Gaon. The Mahzor Vitry* (Nuremberg: Hurwitz, 1924) sheds no light on West European practice in the 12th century.

11. See Ramban, *Op cit.*, p. 276; Rashi, on Gen. 22:2.

12. Saadia gives ten reasons for the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, the sixth being to remind us of the *Akedah*, to teach us that we, too, must be ready at all times to offer our lives for the sanctification of God's name. See *Emunot V'De'ot* (Leipzig, 1859). But Saadia also claims that basic morality exists even without revelation (Hartman, *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest* [Phil.: JPS, 1976], pp. 238, 242); if so, shouldn't Abraham, in the name of basic morality, have at least questioned God's command?

13. *Guide for the Perplexed*, Part III, Ch. 24.

14. Chavel, *Ramban*, p. 275.

15. *Star of Redemption*, William W. Hallo, tr. (N.Y.: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1971), p. 266.

16. See Gen. R. 56:8; Rashi on Gen. 22:2; Hertz, *Op. cit.*, p. 74; Ibn Ezra on Gen. 22:1; Abarbanel on Gen. 22:2, 12.

17. *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, G. Plaut, ed. and ann. (N.Y.: UAHC, 1981), p. 149, where the contradictory observations are made that the *Akedah* was a test of Abraham's faith, but Abraham could have considered the command "legitimate" in the "framework of his time and experience." "Otherwise," says Plaut, "he might have protested God's command with the kind of insistence he exhibited at Sodom and Gomorrah."

18. Elie Wiesel, *Messengers of God* (N.Y.: Random House, 1976), p. 108; Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 18. Some strangely argue that sin redeems sin: viz., that the *Akedah* atones for Abraham's expulsion of Ishmael, and that Abraham made a deal with God to kill Isaac then, in exchange for God's forgiveness of Israel's sins later (David Polish, "The Binding of Isaac," *JUDAISM* [1957]: 17–21; Marvin Fox, "Kierkegaard and Rabbinic Judaism," *JUDAISM* [1953]: 160–9; Louis Feldman, "Josephus: The Akedah," *Jewish Quarterly Review* [Jan. 1985]: 238–40; and Ginzberg, *Legends*, Vol. I, p. 284).

19. Deut. 21:18–20 and Rashi *ad loc.*; B. San. 71a. As to the alphabet, see "Interview with Frank Moore Cross," *Bible Review* (December 1992): 18, 24. Isaac's birth, when Abraham was 100 years old, precedes the Exodus (circa 1225 B.C.E.) by four hundred years, thus placing Abraham's birth toward the end of the 18th century, B.C.E. Cf. I.J. Gelb, *A Study of Writing* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963).

20. Even God's right to kill was challenged by Moses in his plea to God to enter Canaan: "You killed an Egyptian... who was smiting a Jew," God says. "I killed one Egyptian. Look how many You have killed," replies Moses. See Avraham Weiss, "Why is God so Unrelenting Toward Moses?" *Jewish World* (Long Island), July 19–25, 1991: 5; *Midrash P'tirat Moshe*, quoted by Nehamah Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot*, Vol. I (WZO, 1976), at Exodus 2:12.

21. See 1 Samuel 16:1–2 (Radak cites other cases, *ad. loc.*, of prophets who objected to their mission); 1 Kings 19:7, 20:42; cf. 1 Kings 21. There were other prophets who objected to God's command for personal or other reasons. See Jeremiah 11:14, 15:1,

32:16–25; Isaiah 6:5–7; Ezekiel 21:5; Amos 7:1–6. As to Jonah, see B. *Sanhedrin* 89a–b, 90a.

22. See Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot Ha-Kodesh* 138 (p. 157), as supplemented in *Tarbiz* 59 (1990): 497, n.59. Moreover, there is a suggestion in Rambam that even a true prophet must be alert to the possibility that he has not actually or accurately heard or seen, or properly interpreted a “prophecy,” just as a witness with proper qualifications, who must be believed, may — in fact — not be telling the truth (*Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*, Ch. 7).

23. 1 Samuel 15; see also 1 Kings 20:42.

24. B. *Sanhedrin* 90a. B. *Sanhedrin* 89a–b mentions Isaac’s obedience to Abraham in the context of discussing a prophet known to be true (*navi muhzak*); cf. n. 22.

25. B. *Sanhedrin*, 90a; see also *Yevamot* 90b.

26. *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*, 9:3, citing B. *Sanhedrin* 90a, and Deut. 18:15; Rambam, *Commentary to the Mishnah*, Joseph Kafih, tr. (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1963–8), pp. 11–14.

27. *Responsa*, #652; see, also, *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Vol. 8, *Hora’at Sha-ah*; Jonathan Sacks, “Creativity and Innovation in Halakhah,” *The Orthodox Forum — Rabbinic Authority and Personal Autonomy*, Moshe Z. Sokol, ed. (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1992), p. 138.

28. See n.22; Rambam (la-Am, edition), *Commentary to the Mishnah*, Vol. 18, pp. 27–8; *Mishneh Torah, Yesodei ha-Torah* 9:4; *Sefer ha-Mizvot*, Root 11; B. *Shab.* 104a, *Tem.* 16a, *Yoma* 80a; *Sifra* to Lev. 27:34; *Lev. R.* 1:14; *Ex. R.* 28:6, 42:8; *Deut. R.*, *Nizavim* 8:6; *M. Eduyot* 8:7; *J. Ber.* 1:4; B. *B.M.* 59 a–b (even God cannot interfere with the ongoing process of rabbinic interpretation and application of the Torah). See, generally, Z.H. Chajes, *The Student’s Guide Through the Talmud*, Jacob Schachter, tr. and ed. (N.Y.: Philipp Feldheim, Inc., 1960), p. 34; cf. p. 86 and B. *Suk.* 44 a–b; Elliot N. Dorff and Arthur Rosett, *A Living Tree* (Albany: SUNY, 1988), pp. 187–190; Louis Jacobs, *A Tree of Life* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1984), ch. 5, esp. pp. 70–1; Urbach, *The Sages*, ch. 6; David Hartman, *Op. cit.*, pp. 108–119, 238–242.

29. Recall Abraham’s direct challenge to God at Sodom regarding the death of innocents: “Will the Ruler of the entire world not do justice?” (Gen. 18:25).

30. *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Avodah Zarah* 1:1–3; *Guide to the Perplexed*, 1:36, 2:39, 3:29, 3:37. Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik, quoting the Midrash, writes that “until Abraham arrived, God reigned only over the heavens.... (Sifri, 313, *Ha’azinu*). It was Abraham who ‘crowned’ Him God on earth, the God of men (Rashi, Gen. 24:7; *Ber.* 59)” (*Man of Faith in the Modern World, Reflections of the Rav*, Volume Two, adapted from the lectures of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik by Abraham R. Besdin [Hoboken, N.J.: KTAV, 1989], p. 50). Similarly, Yehuda Halevi in *The Kuzari* (N.Y.: Schocken, 1964), Part Four, para. 27 (p. 239), observes, through the Rabbi: “Perhaps this was Abraham’s point of view when divine power and unity dawned upon him prior to the revelation accorded to him” (emphasis added). See also Ginzberg, *Legends*, Vol. I, pp. 189–217 and Vol. V, p. 210.

31. *J. Hagigah* 1:7; Gerson Cohen, *Op. cit.*, p. 73.

32. *Ex. R.* 37:2 and *Lev. R.* 10:3. What follows, which is what I call “the bureaucratic model” because it can be commonly found in that context, can be extended to a variety of other relationships (e.g., marriage), specifically when two persons feel respect, admiration or other positive feelings toward each other such that neither wants unnecessarily to rupture the relationship even when cherished goals or values are threatened. In consulting with Professor James S. Uleman of NYU, Faculty of Arts and Science, Graduate Program in Social-Personality Psychology, I was advised that there is some experimental work that supports my view, e.g., the famous Stanley Milgram (1974) experiments (pressure exerted on the tested individuals to subject others to increasing intensities of electric shock), reported in *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), and the studies of Susan T. Fiske and Shelley E. Taylor, *Social Cognition* (Reading, PA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1984), pp. 106–111 (procrastination to

gather information). During the Holocaust, certain Jewish community leaders turned some of their people over to the Nazis "in the hope of putting off death for as long as possible, for as many as possible," in hopes that the situation might change — pitting the view of Rabbi Avraham Duber Cahana Shapira of the Kovno ghetto (favoring such action) against Maimonides' medieval pronouncement. See Laurence Thomas, "Characterizing and Responding to Nazi Genocide: A Review Essay," *Modern Judaism* 11 (1991): 371–79, at 373; Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 68–76.

Professor Uleman, in a personal letter to the author, dated December 12, 1990, has stated that "procrastination for the purpose of information gathering" would be a predictable response if Abraham did not want to kill Isaac, and particularly if he was not sure whether this was actually being demanded of him.

33. See Rashi, and Hertz, *Op. cit.*, at Lev. 19:3; B. *Yeb.* 5b; *Sifra*, *Kedoshim* 10:87.

34. See Part V, where I show why Abraham chose to obey God's command and wait for God's order to stop, rather than protest and try to change God's mind by human pleas.

35. The strategy of stalling is one of three paradigmatic Jewish responses to the travails and tragedies of the Diaspora. Another response has been to accept, if not embrace, these events as God's plan of punishment or purification, or perhaps even an opportunity for *kiddush ha-Shem*, as Rabbi Akivah is said to have viewed his martyrdom at the hands of the Romans. But cf. Gershon Greenberg, "Myth and Catastrophe in Simha Elberg's Religious Thought," *Tradition* 26 (Fall 1991): 45–6 (where the difference between the *Akedah* and anti-Semitism is recognized). The third response — epitomized by Zionists and Ghetto fighters — has been to fight back (Todd M. Endelman, "The Legitimatization of the Diaspora Experience in Recent Jewish Historiography," *Modern Judaism* [May, 1991]: 195–210).

36. Cf. the aggadah that Abraham *rushed* to kill his son, e.g., Rashi and Hertz, *Ibid.*, at Gen. 22:3, compounding the moral problem of the traditional interpretation.

37. Although the views expressed in this article were independently arrived at by the author, I wish to acknowledge the prior publication by Dr. Joel Wolowelsky of a brief note, in midrashic form, of the basic idea that Abraham never intended to kill Isaac, but waited for God to rescind His command ("Testing God — A Midrash on the *Akedah*," *Dor le Dor*, Vol. VIII, No. 2 [Winter 1979–80]: 98), and Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's suggestion that God was unhappy with Abraham for his eagerness to obey God's command to slaughter Isaac and, therefore, after the *Akedah* God never spoke to Abraham again (*Baltimore Jewish Times*, Week Ending November 3, 1990, p. 52). Since the preparation of this paper, Neil Gillman commented on the *Akedah* in a similar vein ("A Sabbath Week," *Jewish Week*, October 25–31, 1991).

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch used the terms "twisted mind" and "raving madness" when the Reform scholar, Abraham Geiger, suggested that Abraham's greatness at the *Akedah* lay not in his willingness to slaughter Isaac, but in his willingness to desist from doing so at an angel's command. See his commentary in *The Pentateuch*, Genesis, Vol. I, second edition, Isaac Levy, tr. (Gateshead, England: Judaica Press, 1976), pp. 373–4. One is entitled to speculate how Hirsch would have responded to the views of Riskin, et. al., rather than to those of a leader of Reform, which was anathema for Hirsch.

38. Hertz expressly points this out (*Op. cit.*, at Gen. 22:3).

39. See Rashi (citing R. Abba), and Hertz, *Op. cit.*, on Gen. 22:2, 12; Abarbanel on 22:12; Ibn Ezra on 22:1; *Gen. R.* 56:8, 56:12; *The Midrash Says*, Moshe Weissman, ed. (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Benei Yakov, 1980), p. 200; *Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer* 31; and Feldman "Josephus . . .," *Op. cit.*, p. 237.

40. See Hertz, *Op. cit.*, at Gen. 22:5. Similarly, Gen. 22:8 where Abraham assures a concerned Isaac that God will provide a lamb for the sacrifice, which could also mean: "The God whom I worship will never let me kill you." Cf. Ibn Ezra on Gen. 27:18–19, who says that Abraham lied when he said, in 22:15, "we will return."

41. See, e.g., Chavel, *Ramban*, p. 278, commenting on Gen. 22:2.

42. Contrast the rabbis' praise of Abraham with their general condemnation of Jephthah for killing his daughter to fulfill a pre-battle vow, as well as the religious leaders of the time for not finding a way out for him from his vow. *Midrash Tanhuma* (Jer. 19:5) tells of God's reaction to the "slaughter" of the daughter: "The Holy Spirit cried out: 'They have put their children to fire [clearly referring to more than just this incident] ... which I *never* commanded, *never* decreed, and which *never* came to My mind'" (emphasis added). See, also, Spiegel, *Op. cit.* p. 79. As to all child sacrifices as a profanation of God's name, see 2 Kings 3:27 ff., 16:3; Lev. 18:21, 20:2–5, 22; Deut. 12:30–31, 18:9–12. The horror at killing one's child, even when God's law seems to command it, is so great that some later commentators, e.g., Kimhi, Abarbanel, and — most recently — Steinsaltz, claim that Jephthah's daughter was not killed, but lived a cloistered life, as a virgin (Solomon Landers, "Did Jephthah Kill His Daughter?" *Bible Review* [August 1991]: 29–31, 42).

43. See Levi ben Gerson, *Sefer Milhamot Adonai*, III, 2, p. 126 ff; III, 4, p. 137 ff. See also J.D. Bleich, *With Perfect Faith* (N.Y.: KTAV, 1983), p. 417; and Julius Guttmann, *Philosophies of Judaism* (N.Y.: Schocken, 1973), pp. 243–4.

44. Ramban notes at Gen. 22:12 that there is significance in the fact that God ordered the slaughter of Isaac, but an angel ordered Abraham to desist (Chavel, *Ramban*, p. 279). Mysteriously, that explanation, promised to be provided at Gen. 48:16, is not there forthcoming. The Ramban does say earlier, at Gen. 18:1–10, that God often commanded by prophecy, but revoked the command by the word of an angel, although the Midrash claims that Abraham rejected the angelic order to desist because it lacked Divine authority (see n.4).

45. The bases for my conclusion that angels, *in fact*, do not have that power are discussed below; see text at notes 47–57.

46. See, e.g., *Ex. R.*, xviii, 5; R. Isaac of Corbeil, *Sefer Mizvot Katan*, sec. 53; and added citations in n. 49 below. See, also, the discussion in the text above, in connection with the citations in n.5. Disputes arose in the Sanhedrin, after the destruction of the Temple, concerning these two issues. The rabbi espousing the minority opinion sought to prove, through Heavenly signs, that his opinion was correct. In one case, even a Heavenly voice came to his support. The majority refused to change their view despite the Divine legitimization of the minority position.

47. In my research, I have found no instances, in classical Jewish texts, ascribing to angels the power to know what is in the hearts and minds of humans, but only angelic conclusions based on perceptions of human actions. Ascribing such power to God is found often, and such instances are well known. See, for example, the *Song of [God's] Unity* for Tuesday, said on Rosh Hashanah, the first two paragraphs of *Zikhronot* in the *musaf* service on that holiday, and the prayer just before *Al Het* which is said throughout Yom Kippur (*The Complete ArtScroll Mahzor for Rosh Hashanah*, Nosson Scherman, tr. [Brooklyn, N.Y.: Mesorah, 1985], pp. 146–7, 510–13; *The Complete ArtScroll Mahzor for Yom Kippur*, by the same publishers, pp. 92–3). See, also, Proverbs 20:27, Chron. 28:9, and Jeremiah 11:20. Abarbanel, in his commentary on the Haggadah, *Zevah Pesah*, comments on *Barukh ha-Makom* that only God knows what is in a person's mind and heart. See, also, Gen. 18:19 where God, speaking to the angels, emphasizes His special knowledge about Abraham's thoughts and intentions (*Targum, ad loc.* ["It is revealed before Me that Abraham will ..."]); Rashi, *ad loc.* [paraphrasing the Targum: "I know (what is) within him, that he (Abraham) will ..."]; Chavel, *Ramban*, pp. 240–42; *Exodus R.* 2:2).

48. B. *Hagigah* 16a equates the understanding (*da'at*) of humans with that of angels. Clearly, angels cannot know what is in the hearts and minds of people, since humans have no such power. The Abarbanel at Gen. 22:12 states that angels can reason from observed facts. But Abraham's obedience could have been a case of stalling, which would explain the angels' erroneous conclusion that Abraham intended to kill his son.

49. *Gen. R.* 50:2; Rashi on Gen. 18:2; B. *B.M.* 86b. However, Rabbi David Kimhi (Radak) adds that *angels can add or detract somewhat from their specific mission* (Chavel, *Ramban*,

p. 257, n. 233). Radak's view is not an isolated one, but is based on — and, indeed, part of — the tradition that ascribes to angels certain abilities of feeling, action, and even initiative — complaining, reasoning, praising, criticizing, claiming reward (for the righteous; see, e.g., Zechariah 1:11) and punishment (for sinners) — *within the limitations of their essence*, which include goodness, total obedience to God's commands, and the absence of the evil inclination. See, e.g., Rambam, *Guide*, pp. 162–3; *Sefer Yezirah*, Ch. 1, 7; B. *Hagigah* 16a; Abbarbanel at Gen. 22:12; *Shir ha-Shirim R.* 1:8; Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979), pp. 174, 178, 181, 205–6, 221, 461. Thus, e.g., we see the angels complaining about man's creation, and about the giving of the Torah to Moses and Israel at Sinai; seeking justice for innocent Isaac on the altar (simultaneously praising Abraham for his obedience!); expressing joy at the deserved drowning of the Egyptians; and objecting to man's repentance. See, also, n. 54. While it is difficult for us, with a “modern” orientation and outlook, to understand the concept of angels, it is essential to distinguish between acts and statements of God and those of angels. Such distinctions are made in Tanakh, in the Midrash, and by our Sages and commentators. and we are, therefore, entitled to interpret Tanakh based on such distinctions.

50. Here I summarize the material in notes 47–48, and develop additional reasons from an analysis of angelic capabilities.

51. See n. 47.

52. B. *Hagigah* 16a. See, also, citations in Urbach, *The Sages*, p. 221, which state that man “sees” like the angels, presumably *external* rather than internal facts like thoughts and emotions (see n. 47).

53. R. Joseph Albo, *Ikkarim* 2:28; *Yalkut Shimoni* 67; *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 22; *Midrash Tehillim* 94:4; *Gen. R.* 48:11; *Shir ha-Shirim R.* 1:8; B. *Shabbat* 88b–89a; *The Torah Anthology* (TA) by Rabbi Y.B. Arguithi. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, tr., *Yalkut Me'am Lo'ez* 15 (N.Y.: Maznaim, 1984), pp. 220–3. See, also, S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (N.Y.: Schocken, 1961), pp. 81, 82, 257, 285, and citations on p. 81, n. 2.

54. B. *Sota*, 33a; T.P. *Sanhedrin*, x, 2, p. 28c; *Lev. R.* xxx, 3, p. 697; *Ruth R.* v, 14; *Deut. R.* ii, 4; *Midrash Tehillim* 94, 4; *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana* 24:11; see also Schechter, *Rabbinic Theology*, pp. 321–2, and citations on p. 322, n. 1; Urbach, *The Sages*, pp. 461, 753, 891. Consistently, the angels opposed the creation of man (*Gen. R.* 8:4–5; TA 15, p. 220; Urbach, *The Sages*, p. 206), and they opposed giving the Torah to man because humans could not always obey it (B. *Shabbat*, 89b; *Pesikta Rabbati*, 98a–b; *Ex. R.* 281; *Cant. R.* viii, 11). See, generally, David E. Fass, “How The Angels Do Serve,” JUDAISM, vol. 40, no. 3 (Summer, 1991): 281–9.

55. Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik has pointed out that repentance is fulfilled in two ways: by *kiyyum*, sincere abandonment and renunciation of sin, and commitment never to do the prohibited act (or neglect the doing of a positive commandment) in the future; and *ma'asseh*, the objective, physical act by which this intent is objectified (P. Peli [on J.B. Soloveitchik], *Al ha-Teshuvah* [Jerusalem: WZO, 1975] [Hebrew], p. 40). (There is an English translation by P. Peli, published in Jerusalem by Orot, in 1975.) I suggest that the angels oppose repentance because they cannot know or verify the internal aspects of its fulfillment in the human heart, and because — due to their own perfection — they inherently have no ability to feel compassion for man's moral struggle with his evil inclination — because angels have no such inclination (or struggle) themselves. See, e.g., Rambam, *Guide*, Part II, Ch. VII, pp. 162–3; and *Shir ha-Shirim R.* 1:8. Without understanding there can be no compassion, and without compassion there can be no forgiveness. This is evidently the root of angelic opposition both to man's creation and to the giving of the Torah to man.

56. *Num. R.* 22:9; *Midrash Tehillim* 14:1; *Midrash Proverbs* 12. In Kabbalah, the angels are said to consist of four heavenly elements: mercy, strength, beauty, and dominion. (*Sefer Yezirah* 1:7; *Pardes Rimonim* 24:10). This is not necessarily inconsistent with the conclusion that angels cannot know what is in the human mind and heart, since the

angelic element of mercy is not based on compassion but on justice. Thus, in *Tanḥuma*, *Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer*, *Midrash ha-Gadol* on Gen. 2:11–12, and Ginzberg, *Legends*, Vol. I, p. 281, they plead for Isaac, not out of compassion but because the *Akedah* is unjust to him (and to Abraham and Sarah, because of their merit and God's promises to them).

57. B. *Shabbat* 12b; *Shulḥan Arukh*, *Yoreh De'ah*, 335, 5 and *The Taz*, *ad loc.*; *Shulḥan Arukh*, *Orah Hayyim*, 101, 4; B. *Sotah* 33a; cf. Abarbanel, *Zevah Pesah*, on *Ha Lahma Anya*, who states that angels understand all languages, citing B. *Sotah* 36b and *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, 24.

58. See the three *midrashim* cited at the end of n. 56; also, Ginzberg, *Legends*, Vol. I, pp. 272–3 and Vol. V, pp. 248–9. Angels cannot act morally independently because they have no evil inclination, only the good one, *yezer tov* (*Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* 1:8; *Sefer Mizvot Katan* [1566], p. 81; Y. Culi, *The Torah Anthology: Me'am Loez* [TA], Vol. 3 [N.Y.: Maznaim, 1984], pp. 137–8). Cf. the Amoraic statement that the angels were envious of the Sanhedrin, cited in E. Urbach's *The Sages*, pp. 181, 205.

59. See *The Kuzari*, Part I. Arguably, the Noahide laws were not given by a private revelation but to all of Noah's family, validated by the publicly visible sign of the (first) rainbow, paralleling the "visible" thunder and lightning at Sinai (Gen. 9:1–17; Ex. 20:18). There have been post-Sinaitic revelations to individuals, e.g., many kabbalists, and the maggidic visions of R. Joseph Karo and Moses Hayyim Luzzatto (RaMHaL; see his *Zohar Tinyana* [*The Second Zohar*]). But Judaism rejects revelation as the source of post-Sinai legal decisions, or the addition, abrogation, suspension, or violation of halakhah, except for prophetic *hora'at sha-ah*, discussed above.

60. Similarly, B. *Yoma* 28b interprets Gen. 26:5 to mean that Abraham observed the written and oral law. (See note 2). However, Rashi, Rashbam, and *Or Ha'Hayyim* interpret "because Abraham listened to My voice" as referring to the trials of Abraham, including the *Akedah*; Ibn Ezra is uncertain. Ramban includes the *Akedah* trial under "My commandments," but also includes God's command that Abraham be *merciful* under "My ordinances!" Even if this text does refer to the *Akedah*, that would not tell us whether Abraham's merit there was obedience to God's voice or to His moral commandments.

61. Gen. 18:19; Deut. 12:31; 2 Kings 3:26–7; Jer. 7:31, 9:23.

62. B. *Rosh Hashanah* 16a's statement that blowing the ram's horn recalls for God, "for your benefit, the binding of Isaac . . . and I shall account it for you as if you yourselves [future generations] bound yourselves up before Me," may be interpreted as reflecting this faith, and not a zealous desire by Abraham to kill his son.

63. Hayyim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, eds., *The Book of Legends*, William G. Braude, tr. (N.Y.: Schocken, 1992), pp. 40–41. Although Abraham and Isaac ascend Moriah together, the Torah emphasizes that Abraham "returned to his young men" alone (Gen. 22:19; *Midrash Hagadol* [Margulies edition], p. 360); they settle in different places and never meet or speak to each other again. See, also, Shlomo Riskin, "Love is Not Enough," *Jerusalem Post*, Week Ending November 21, 1992, p. 19, and Plaut, *Op. cit.*, p. 152. That Isaac did not receive the patriarchal blessing from his father, but only from God, who expressly predicated it on his father's devotion to God's law (Gen. 26:3–5; cf. Gen. 25:5 and Rashi *ad loc.*), which did not occur when Jacob received the blessing (27:28–9, 28:4), indicates that God intended finally to assure a traumatized and estranged Isaac that his father had never intended to kill him.

64. *The Book of Legends*, pp. 41–2. A key aspect of Abraham's test at the *Akedah* was the conflict between the command to kill Isaac, and God's earlier promise to Abraham that his seed would be perpetuated through Isaac.

The Sacrifice of Isaac

STEVEN SHOEMAKER

Isaac, Isaac, my son, my son . . .
I know it makes you nervous when
I stare, so I will watch the wall
to see the shadow of your face.

Teachers sent home silhouettes
when you were young: in clay, hand prints,
footprints, profiles, marks that you left
behind. But still it is your face.

Years ago you stared at me,
your eyes were trusting, learning, free
of fear, doubt, pain. Your eyes would laugh
at me when I would make a face.

Years have elevated eyes
and now you watch the world from my
perspective: big goals and big falls,
accomplishment! big grin on face.

Now I take the knife to cut
you free. Obedient, you let
me have my way. I give you life
and death. You do not turn your face.

STEVEN SHOEMAKER is *Pastor of McKinley Presbyterian Church and Foundation,
University of Illinois, Champaign, Illinois.*

Women and Prayer: An Attempt to Dispel Some Fallacies

JUDITH HAUPTMAN

IT IS TIME TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT.

Most Jews think that women, unlike men, are not obligated to pray daily, and have responded accordingly. Orthodox women find this perceived exemption a useful rationale for not praying daily. Orthodox men have utilized it to answer feminists who wish to be counted in the quorum of ten and serve as prayer leader: since women are not obligated to pray, they say, women cannot be counted in the quorum and lead the group in prayer. Conservative rabbis employ the perceived exemption as the starting point of a responsum: only women who voluntarily accept upon themselves the obligation to pray can serve as prayer leaders for the group.

But as widespread, well-entrenched, and “convenient” as this notion of women and prayer is, it is wrong. A close reading of rabbinic and post-rabbinic texts yields the following, rather remarkable facts: 1) from the time of the Mishnah and onward, women have been obligated to say the *tefillah* (set of eighteen blessings) two or three times daily; 2) an obligation to pray does not, in and of itself, entitle a woman — or anyone else — to serve as *sheliah zibbur* (prayer leader); additional requirements must be met.

1. Women and the Obligation to Pray

The first source to address the topic of women and prayer is Mishnah *Berakhot*. After setting down the rules for reciting *Shema* each day, the Mishnah lists those people who are exempt from the recital: pall-bearers, who are exempt from both *Shema* and *tefillah*, and second-tier mourners (those who only escort the bier to burial), who are obligated to read *Shema* but are exempt from *tefillah*.¹ Since both *Shema* and *tefillah* require concentration,² it would seem that certain mourners are exempt from *tefillah* but are still obligated to say *Shema*, because prayer is rabbinically enacted whereas *Shema*, according to the rabbis, is Torah-mandated. Torah-imposed obligations are lifted only when absolutely necessary, as for pall-bearers.

The Mishnah then says that women are exempt from reciting *Shema* and from donning *tefillin*, but are obligated to say *tefillah*, hang

JUDITH HAUPTMAN is Associate Professor of Talmud at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York.

a mezuzah, and recite Grace.³ Requiring women to say some prayers but not others, in particular obligating them to the rabbinically-ordained *tefillah* while exempting them from the Biblical confession of faith, is strange.⁴ It appears to be a calculated attempt on the part of the rabbis to separate women from the most theologically significant utterances of Judaism.

The Gemara (*Berakhot* 20b) addresses this anomaly. Although its commentary on this Mishnah is composed of a series of brief segments, one for each obligation or exemption mentioned in the Mishnah, there is a common theme running throughout: an attempt on the part of the anonymous talmudic voice (the *sama d'Gemara*) to demonstrate that this Mishnah is completely in agreement with the general guidelines for women and *mizvot* established elsewhere, in Mishnah *Qiddushin* 1:7.

Commenting on women's exemption from *Shema*, the Gemara exclaims: But it is obvious that women are exempt, for *Shema* is a time-bound positive *mizvah*, and women are exempt from *mizvot* of this kind! But, the Gemara responds, since *Shema* embodies a confession of faith — the acceptance of the Kingship of Heaven — one might think that women, like men, would be required to read these verses daily. Hence, to counter such erroneous yet logical thinking, the Mishnah needs to state that women are exempt.

A few lines later, when examining women's obligation to recite the *tefillah*, the Gemara notes succinctly that the reason why women are obligated is that prayer is petition. Since a woman serves as her own most effective advocate, she should recite *tefillah*.⁵ Were the discussion to end at this point,⁶ we would know all we needed: women must pray daily to petition God for what they want because they, like men, are human beings with needs. But the Gemara (in many versions)⁷ goes on to say that, since one might have thought that prayer is "like" a time-bound positive *mizvah* — because of the verse requiring prayer three times daily⁸ — and that women are, therefore, exempt, the Mishnah finds it necessary to state that women are obligated — leaving it unclear whether this is because it is *not* a time-bound positive commandment, or because, although it is time-bound, women's need to pray is overriding.

This section is problematic. Initially, the Gemara appears to imply the proposition that prayer is a time-bound positive *mizvah*, but women are obligated for a special reason — that prayer is petitionary. However, in going on to raise the time-bound issue, the Gemara seems to take an altogether different stance: prayer may be a non-time-bound positive *mizvah* which, it follows, women are obligated to fulfill. This textual tension, generated by what appears to be a later alteration in the wording of the passage, gave rise to a number of different interpretive approaches to the issue of women and prayer. Yet, despite their differ-

ences, the commentators are virtually unanimous in their endorsement of women's obligation to pray.

Surveying some of the key commentators and codes, we find:

1) Rashi and Tosafot hold that, since prayer is rabbinically ordained, its originators have the right to obligate women for whatever reason they see fit.⁹ It follows that the *tefillah* that the Mishnah obligates women to recite is exactly the same one that men are obligated to recite, and that both must recite it with the same frequency.

2) R. Isaac Alfasi, an eleventh century North African contemporary of Rashi, writes simply: "*Shema* and *tefillin* are time-bound positive *mizvot*, and, hence, women are exempt; *tefillah*, *mezuzah*, and Grace are non-time-bound positive *mizvot* and, hence, women are obligated."

3) Living one century later, Maimonides says that prayer — in its pristine form, without fixed liturgy, frequency, or times of day — is ordained by Torah; it follows that women are obligated.¹⁰ He goes on to note that, because of the vagaries of history, it became necessary for the rabbis to provide people with a fixed liturgy. The imposition of a series of additional requirements did not expressly distinguish between men and women.

4) Joseph Karo, author of the *Shulhan Arukh*, the authoritative and routinely consulted code of Jewish law that was published in the sixteenth century, says: "Women, even though they are exempt from *Shema*, are obligated to recite *tefillah*, because it is a non-time-bound positive commandment."¹¹

It is thus clear that, from the time of the Mishnah and for the next 1400 years, women, although generally exempt from time-bound positive *mizvot*, were obligated to recite a fixed liturgy at fixed times. Note that although daily prayer seems as quintessentially time-bound as a *mizvah* could possibly be, given the *termini a quo* and *ad quem* presented later in Mishnah *Berakhot*, the Mishnah's ruling that women are obligated, when examined in the context of general principles of women and *mizvot*, forced most commentators to adopt the position that prayer is not time-bound and, therefore, obligates women just like men.

The first person in halakhic history to suggest that prayer at fixed times and with a fixed liturgy was no longer obligatory upon women is the 17th century commentator on the *Shulhan Arukh*, *Magen Avraham* (Abraham Gumbiner). He contends that the basis for Karo's ruling is Maimonides' statement that women are obligated to pray. However, he continues, since prayer as a *mizvah* of Torah origin lacks a fixed text and fixed times, this explains why the women of his day do not pray regularly, why all that they do each morning is to recite some petition at the time when they wash their hands, and this, in his opinion, is sufficient. He does go on to say that Ramban (Nahmanides) and most other commentators hold that prayer is rabbinic, but does not spell out the consequences of this other approach.

It is important to recognize that *Magen Avraham* is only imputing to Rambam the idea that women's obligation to pray is unlike that of men, that the Mishnah's expression "are obligated [to say *tefillah*]" means one thing for men and another for women. Rambam himself never suggested that such a distinction exists.¹² *Magen Avraham*'s interpretation is designed, as he himself acknowledges, to provide a halakhic basis for women's lapsed performance.¹³ Although such a strategy is acceptable and even standard in responsa writing, for our purposes it is important to identify it as such.

Magen Avraham's justification of limited prayer for women, which could easily have become the dominant view, did not.¹⁴ Later codifiers chose, instead, to encourage women to start doing what they had stopped doing — praying the fixed prayers regularly, at the fixed times. The nineteenth century codist, R. Yehiel Epstein, author of *Arukh Ha-Shulhan*, the popular commentary on the *Shulhan Arukh*, cites Rambam's statement that prayer originates in Torah, and then adds, by way of explanation: "Even though the rabbis then set prayer at fixed times in fixed language, it was not their intention [thereby] to issue a leniency and exempt women from this ritual act." He contrasts the approach of Rashi and Tosafot, which is that the obligation to pray is rabbinic, and that women were (and are) required to pray three times a day just like men, with that of Rambam and Rif [R. Isaac Alfasi], which is that the obligation to pray is from the Torah, but the specifics of the liturgy and times of prayer are rabbinic and apply to men only, which permits women to pay only minimal attention to this *mizvah*.¹⁵ But it is hard to know where he stands on the matter. His closing statement appears to lament the fact that the women of his day are not scrupulous in their fulfillment of the *mizvah* of regular, daily prayer: "Only with great difficulty can one reconcile women's behavior with the recommendations of Rashi and Tosafot. But according to Rif and Rambam their behavior makes sense."

The prominent twentieth century halakhist, R. Meir Hakohen (more popularly known as the *Hafez Hayyim*), the author of the *Mishnah Berurah*, (a commentary on the *Shulhan Arukh*), takes a clear stand in favor of full obligation (*OH*106:1, note 4) like Tosafot. He claims that even though, according to Rambam (as understood by *Magen Avraham*), women are only obligated to utter daily some petition, as required by the Torah, and even though, according to Rambam, prayer (in all its particulars) is rabbinically ordained as a time-bound positive *mizvah* from which women would be exempt, the Men of the Great Assembly — who ordained prayer — still obligated women to say *shaharit* and *minhah* each day, "just like men," since the essence of prayer is petitions for mercy. Therefore, he concludes, one should admonish women to pray regularly. Furthermore, like Karo (*OH* 70:1), he suggests that women, even though they are exempt from reciting the *Shema*, should

still accept upon themselves the yoke of Heaven. What this means, according to Isserles (in his gloss on Karo), is reciting the first verse of *Shema*.¹⁶ By the time *Hafez Hayyim* ends his discussion of women and prayer, he has obligated them not only to *tefillah*, but to virtually all of the components of morning and afternoon prayer.

Given this history of a consistently expanding obligation of women to pray, I find it hard to understand why the various responsa written recently on this topic fail to mention this trend at all.¹⁷ Why should a woman have to assume voluntarily an obligation to pray if, from the time of the Mishnah on, she already had one? Ignoring such a long-standing and substantial obligation distorts the tradition's rather sympathetic view of women, their need to pray, and its general recognition of their obligation to do so. Moreover, it is ironic that, while the right wing Orthodox establishment chides women for not fulfilling time-honored halakhic requirements to pray, the Conservative movement — basing itself on the very same codes — announces to the world just the opposite, that, although women are not required to pray, they can take this obligation upon themselves!

2. Women as Prayer Leaders

The clearest statement in the Mishnah on a person's eligibility to perform a ritual act for another appears at the end of *Rosh Hashanah* 3:8: "A deaf-mute, an imbecile, and a minor may not discharge the obligations of others. This is the general principle: whoever is not obligated to perform a certain act, may not perform this act on behalf of others." It is obvious that the second statement provides the rationale for the first: some people may not be designated as shofar-blowers for the congregation because they themselves are not obligated to fulfill this *mizvah*.

Many people who read the Mishnah's general principle assume that its inverse is also true, namely, that if a person is obligated to perform a certain ritual act, then he may perform it on behalf of others. But a statement and its inverse do not always have the same truth value. This Mishnah is saying that the obligation to perform a particular *mizvah* is a *necessary* condition for being able to discharge the obligations of others;¹⁸ it does *not* say that obligation is both a *necessary and sufficient* condition for the performance of a *mizvah* for others.

Applying this principle to the issue of women and prayer yields the following: if a woman is not obligated to pray, then she cannot discharge the obligations of others. But if she is obligated to pray — and, as demonstrated above, she is — obligation alone will not permit her to lead the group in prayer. It may be necessary for her, or *anyone else who is obligated to pray*, to meet other conditions as well.

To find out what those other conditions are, one may find it helpful

to examine another case of women and prayer, this time Grace after meals. There are two mishnaic rulings on the subject. *Berakhot* 3:3 says that women are obligated to recite Grace; however, *Berakhot* 7:2 says that women may not be included in the *zimmun*, the leader's opening call to recite Grace together.¹⁹ While it is clear that their obligation to recite Grace does not necessarily entitle them to join or lead the *zimmun*, the question remains: what is necessary, beyond obligation, to enable a person to join or lead the *zimmun*? Although the Mishnah is silent on this subject, a tannaitic source (a *braita*) appearing in the Babylonian Talmud, in conjunction with Mishnah *Berakhot* 3:3, provides some insight: "A woman may recite Grace for her husband . . . but a curse alight on any man who allows his wife to do so" (20b).²⁰ Since other sources make it perfectly clear that one man may recite Grace for another,²¹ the explanation for the *braita*'s use of the curse metaphor regarding a woman's inability to recite Grace for a man — even though she herself is obligated — seems to be that, in addition to obligation, a person needs *social status* in order to qualify as a prayer leader. In this case, in the tannaitic period, social status is defined by gender.

Other sources support the conclusion that social considerations play a role in determining eligibility to discharge the obligations of others. To serve as prayer leader for the group, a person needs, in addition to an obligation to pray, a mature and dignified appearance. This, according to the Talmud, as strange as it may sound, is epitomized by a beard. We read in *Hullin* 24b: "When his beard grows in, he may serve as *sheliah zibbur* and pass before the ark and lift his hands in the priestly blessing."²² That is, even though a boy has reached the age of obligation, he may not serve in certain leadership roles until his beard grows in. Why? The talmudic passage does not explain but, about 1000 years later, the *Shulhan Arukh* does: "One may appoint only a bearded *sheliah zibbur* because of the dignity of the congregation. However, if there is no one available to lead the group in prayer except for a thirteen year old boy,²³ it is better that he lead the group than that it lose the opportunity to hear *kedushah* and *kaddish*" (*OH* 53:6,7). These rules make it eminently clear that a congregation composed of men of all ages may not appoint a thirteen year old boy, even though he has reached the age of obligation, to represent it, because the dignity of the congregation will be compromised by a person speaking for it who is of lower social standing than its other members, and one measure of this is youthfulness as indicated by beardlessness.

A similar statement appears in *Megillah* 23a in the context of a discussion about reading the Torah in public. A tannaitic source states that women, in theory, could count in the seven *aliyot* on Shabbat, meaning that they are eligible to read from the Torah, but, because of the "dignity of the congregation" (the same term used later in the *Shulhan Arukh* about an unbearded *bar mizvah* leading the prayers, noted above),

they are not called to do so.²⁴ That is, women as women may be called to read from the Torah on Shabbat. But, in a society where their social standing makes them subordinate to, and dependent upon, men, and, hence, of lesser dignity, women may not.²⁵

Even more evidence of the distinction between technical eligibility and social acceptability can be found in Mishnah *Megillah* 4:6, which says that a person dressed in rags may lead *Shema* (from his place, where he will not be seen)²⁶ but may not read from the Torah or lead the fixed prayers or the priestly blessing. Since men are obligated to pray, the likely explanation for limiting the leadership role of a man dressed in rags is the social unacceptability of a partially unclothed body. That is, in addition to being obligated to pray, a *sheliaḥ zibbur* has to conform to the communal dress code.²⁷ When and if such an eligible person no longer is considered socially unacceptable, e.g., when he wears proper attire, he becomes qualified to lead the congregation.

To return to the issue of women and prayer: although an obligation to pray is a necessary condition for women to serve as prayer leader, it is not sufficient. In addition, the designated individual has to be someone who commands the respect of the congregation, or, stated differently, is socially acceptable to it. A boy of thirteen who lacks a mature and dignified appearance, i.e., who is beardless, and a woman, by virtue of her gender, have been considered in the past to compromise the dignity of the congregation and, for that reason, despite the fact that both are obligated to pray, they are prohibited from serving as prayer leaders.

Were someone to write a responsum today permitting women to serve as *sheliaḥ zibbur*, it seems to me that two building blocks of the argument would be as follows: 1) Because women were always obligated to pray, and their obligations have even increased over time, prayer for women need not and cannot be regarded as a self-imposed obligation; 2) however, obligation alone is not sufficient. For a woman to lead the congregation, the community must view her social standing as equal to a man's. If it does, she meets both halakhic requirements.

Can a community adjust its outlook so that it no longer sees women as inferior to men? I think so. Evidence that changes do occur in communal social standards *and that these changes then have halakhic ramifications* can be brought from the fact that most congregations today do not think twice before appointing a beardless *sheliaḥ zibbur*, notwithstanding the *Shulḥan Arukh's* ban, *ab initio*, on such a leader, and the *Mishnah Berurah's* stern warning that a congregation may not compromise its standards on this point.²⁸ In a similar vein, Radbaz (15th century) issued a number of rulings, in some cases involving women, which differed from Talmudic opinions on the grounds of changed social and economic conditions.²⁹

If a community recognizes that in all other spheres of life women occupy the same social standing as men, it becomes odd and even mor-

ally reprehensible to retain the notion of women's inferiority, with its attendant disabilities, in the religious arena alone — particularly where their social standing and acceptability is the explicitly governing factor in the formulation and application of the halakhah. There is no question that halakhic attitudes can, and do, change in response to evolving social attitudes. The challenge that remains is for the community to trip the switch and set the halakhic process in motion.

NOTES

1. *Berakhot* 3:1,2.
2. *Berakhot* 2:1–5;4:4–6;5:1.
3. The reason why these five items appear together at this juncture seems to be that three of these five are the main subjects of this tractate — *Shema*, *tefillah*, and Grace after meals, and the other two, *tefillin* and *mezuzah*, are close associates of *Shema* because they derive from the same paragraphs of Torah.
4. I am interpreting the expression “obligated to X but exempt from Y” in the same way for both the mourners and the women. Since *tefillah* and *Shema*, throughout the Mishnah, refer to the verses and petitions that form the essence of daily prayer, I find no reason to suggest that *tefillah*, as employed here, refers to something else, such as one simple request. Although there are commentators who later reduce women's obligation to just that, the burden of proof is upon them to show that the Mishnah here did not intend to have women recite daily the same *tefillah* as men. See Hanokh Albeck, *Seder Zeraim* (Bialik-Dvir: 1957), pp. 329–330, who suggests that women were in the habit of saying the *tefillah*, and that is why the Mishnah obligates them to continue to do so.
5. A similar statement is found in the Palestinian Talmud (*Berakhot* 6b): “women are obligated to say *tefillah* — so that each and every person may ask for mercy for herself.”
6. *Hagahot Habah*, *Berakhot* 20b, *ad locum*, takes this position.
7. See *Digdugei Soferim*, note *vav*.
8. Psalms 55:18.
9. Rashi and Tosafot (s.v. *b'tefillah peshita*) differ on the question of whether a rabbinically ordained *mizvah* may be classified as time-bound positive or non-time-bound positive, from which would flow women's obligation or exemption. Rashi holds that rabbinic *mizvot* may not be classified in that way; Tosafot holds that they may.
10. *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Tefillah* 1:1–4.
11. *Orah Hayyim*, 106:2.
12. Rambam, in his commentary on *Berakhot* 3:3, says: “All of this [the Mishnah's rules about women and *mizvot*] is clear. In the appropriate place in *Kiddushin* it speaks of the *mizvot* which women are not obligated to perform and the rationale [for the exemption].” The *Kesef Mishneh* commentary (written by Karo) on Rambam's *Hilkhot Tefillah* says, *ad locum*, that the source of Rambam's ruling [that women are obligated to pray] is M. *Berakhot* 3:3. This means, according to this commentator, that Rambam is doing no more than fixing halakhah according to the Mishnah. No suggestion is made that Rambam sees women's obligation to pray as substantively different from men's. See n.4.
13. The same commentator also notes that women walk out during the reading of the Torah (*Magen Avraham*, *OH* 282:3). Others have noted that women have stopped reciting *birkhat hagomel* after giving birth. See Eliyaqim Ellenson, *Ha'ishah V'hamizvot* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1977), vol. 1, p. 137.
14. However, this view of limited prayer for women has found adherents in today's Orthodox community where many women, who are observant in every other way, do not pray. R. Obadiah Yossef, the former Sefardic chief rabbi of Israel, writes (*Yalqut Yossef*, part 1 [Jerusalem, 1985], p. 185) that women are not required to pray three times

daily but are required to pray once, and the preferred prayer for women is *shaharit*. He also recommends that they say *birkhot hashahar*, *birkhot hatorah*, and the first verse of *Shema*.

15. *Arukh HaShulhan*, O.H. 106:5-7. This interpretation of Rambam and Rif follows the Magen Avraham approach.

16. *Hafez Hayyim* writes (70:1, note 2) that women are also obligated to recite *birkhot hashahar*, *pesuqei d'imrah*, and one of the blessings after *Shema*. As for the prayers that they are not obligated to recite, says the *Hafez Hayyim*, they may certainly accept upon themselves even the recitation of those prayers. And, if they do so, they recite them with the appropriate blessings.

17. Joel Roth and Israel Francus, whose papers appear in *The Ordination of Women as Rabbis* (JTSA: New York, 1988), make no mention of women's obligation to pray. Neither does Hershel Schachter, in his lengthy attack on women praying together, as a group and not as a *minyan* (*Bet Yizhaq* 17, 5745 [1985], pp. 18-34).

18. The only other statement with equivalent truth value to this one is its contrapositive: if one may discharge the obligations of others, it follows that the discharger himself is obligated to perform that *mizvah*.

19. The Talmud allows a *zimmun* composed exclusively of women, but not a mixed one of women and slaves or women and minors (*Berakhot* 45b). Elsewhere, the Talmud asks if a woman's obligation to recite Grace is of Torah origin or rabbinic origin; if of Torah origin, she may recite Grace for men; if of rabbinic origin, she may not (*Berakhot* 20b). Since the matter is apparently left unresolved, the early commentators and codists render a decision. R. Isaac Alfasi (11 c.) writes that Grace is not a time-bound positive *mizvah* and, therefore, women are obligated. Whether or not he implies, thereby, that a woman may lead a man in Grace, is the subject of intense dispute among his many interpreters. Maimonides (12 c.), in *Hilkhhot Berakhot* 5:1, writes that since one cannot say with certainty that a woman's obligation is derived from Torah, she may not recite Grace for a man. Rabbeinu Asher (13 c.) writes that since the Gemara's question was not answered, women may not lead Grace for men. R. Joseph Karo (16 c.), in the *Shulhan Arukh* (*Orah Hayyim* 186:1), comments that it is not clear whether a woman's obligation to recite Grace is Torah-derived, which means that she may recite it for men, or whether it is of rabbinic origin, which means that she may not. It is remarkable that he does not express an opinion on the matter. The *Hafez Hayyim* (20 c., *ad locum*) in his commentary on the *Shulhan Arukh*, sides with those who say that women may not recite Grace for men.

20. The Tosefta (*Berakhot* 5:17) brings a similar source but does not explain why a wife, although technically eligible to recite Grace for a husband, may not do so.

21. *Berakhot* 45b.

22. This source first appears in Tosefta *Hagigah* 1:3: "A boy who has produced two pubic hairs is required to perform all the *mizvot* of the Torah ... when his beard grows in he may serve as *sheliah zibbur*" Saul Lieberman (*Tosefta Kifshuta*, JTSA, 1962, pp. 1273-1275) writes that "beard" refers to facial and not pubic hair, as some have thought. For our purposes, though, whatever "growing a beard" may mean, it clearly refers to a later stage of development than the onset of puberty.

23. According to the Talmud, the age of obligation is determined by puberty. In the course of time this standard was expanded to thirteen years old and one day in addition to puberty and then limited to thirteen years old and one day alone. For instance, the author of *Halakhot Gedolot* (9 c.) states that a boy needs to reach puberty and, also, the age of thirteen years old and one day in order to lead (*pores al*) *Shema*. R. Eliezer b. Joel Halevi (d. 1220) writes in *Sefer Haravyah*, that thirteen years old and one day is the age of obligation for boys (part 2, #569, p. 294).

24. The Talmud's concern elsewhere about the sexual distraction of hearing a woman's voice while reciting *Shema* (*kol b'ishah ervah*, B. Ber. 24a) is not part of its rationale here, nor is the concept of "dignity of the congregation" a matter of sexual distraction or *prizut*. See Maharam of Rothenburg, Responsa, no. 47; Ben Zion Uziel *Mishpetei Uziel*,

Hoshen Mishpat, no. 6. The Tosefta's version of the rule concerning women reading from the Torah (*Megillah* 3:11) is slightly different and rather hard to understand: "All may be counted in the seven *aliyot* [of Shabbat], even a woman, even a minor. One may not bring a woman to read in public." According to Lieberman, (*Tosefta Kifshuta*, p. 1177), who bases himself on the *Rishonim* (early Talmudic commentators), this means that a woman may read only if one man has already read: but if there is no man at all who can read from the Torah, one may not bring a woman to read because, in these circumstances, she cannot discharge the obligations of others. Lieberman does not comment on the meaning of "the dignity of the congregation" as used in *Megillah* 23a. It seems to me that this phrase is the Talmud's addition to the Tosefta's rule to explain the relationship between its two parts: the reason why a woman may not be brought to read in public, even though she is counted in the seven *aliyot*, is that she compromises the dignity of the congregation. See next note.

25. Today, however, with Jewish women socially equal, and encouraged from their earliest years in Jewish learning, any discomfort that a male might feel in their presence is, to say the least, misplaced. See n. 29. Cf. David Feldman, "Woman's Role and Jewish Law," *Conservative Judaism* (Summer, 1972):30, 37, n. 45, and David Novak, *Tomeikh Ke-Halakhah* (N.Y.: Union of Traditional Conservative Judaism, 1986), p. 24.

26. Albeck, *Mishnah Megillah*, p. 366.

27. See Tosefta *Megillah* 3:27,30.

28. *OH* 53:7; *Mishnah Berurah*, note 23.

29. See, e.g., Responsa of Radbaz, nos. 974, 975, 1076. It is possible to cite numerous other examples of Jewish practices that are affected by changes in social outlook. Probably the best known one is the decision made by the *Hafez Hayyim* (*Liqutei Halakhah*, *Sotah* 20a) to educate women in classical Jewish texts. His rationale is a social one: since women now acquire a sophisticated secular education, there is a risk that their motivation to remain observant will lapse unless they are properly educated in Jewish texts as well. See, also, similar comments by a variety of contemporary decisors in *Ha'ishah V'hamizvot*, Vol. 1, pp. 159-162. A different kind of socially-impelled change is found in Daniel Sperber's chapter "On Drinking Wine at a Circumcision and the Social Standing of Women" in *Minhagei Yisrael*, Vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1990), pp. 60-66. The prior standard practice to give the cup of wine at a circumcision to the mother, upon whose lap the child was circumcised, changed when circumcisions began to be performed in the synagogue and people felt it socially inappropriate for a woman to sit among men. She was no longer permitted to serve as *sandeq*, nor was the cup of wine given to her. See, also, Sperber's lengthy note (p. 66, n. 18) on women losing the right to serve as circumcisors, which, he feels, was motivated, in part, by social considerations. See, also, J. David Bleich's comments, in *Contemporary Halakhic Problems*, Vol. 2 (New York: Ktav, 1983), pp. 368-375 on the changing rabbinic perception of deaf-mutes, resulting from their demonstrated educability, and the changes in halakhic attitude toward them that could result. Should one argue that this case does not call for a change in halakhah but, simply, the recognition that such a person is no longer to be placed in the rabbinic category of one who is mentally incompetent, the same kind of argument could be made with regard to women. Once one provides an explanation — scientific, medical, social, or any other — of why the halakhah, in the past, categorized people the way it did, it becomes possible to argue for recategorization, i.e., for a change in a halakhic ruling today based on traditional, unchanged halakhic principles. Indeed, Bleich cites a number of rabbis who now treat deaf-mutes differently from a halakhic standpoint because of changing perceptions of their abilities.

NEW FROM MOHR: Jewish thought and
Jewish rules throughout the ages

**Companion to
Samaritan Studies**

Edited by Alan D. Crown,
Reinhard Pummer,
Abraham Tal

The work is an encyclopaedic dictionary of the Samaritans: their history, life practices, belief, society, anthropology, art, folklore, cult, culture, literature, law and languages. As such it incorporates the latest researches in the field of Samaritan studies including areas that were not fully treated in the preceding book, *The Samaritans*. It also adds more information about a range of topics that expands what was in the preceding book and provides a ready reference for scholars and students alike. There is no area of Samaritan studies that escapes scrutiny, in longer discussions there is an up to date bibliography to guide the beginner into the field of interest. Articles were written by established leaders in the field. It acts as a complement to *The Samaritans* but stands in its own right as an independent contribution to scholarship and as a complete survey of the Samaritans.

1993. 500 pages (est.).
ISBN 3-16-145666-1 cloth
\$ 112.50 (est.) – January

The Samaritans

Edited by Alan D. Crown

1989. XXI, 865 pages. ISBN 3-16-145237-2 cloth \$ 248.50

**Synopse zum Talmud
Yerushalmi**

Edited by Peter Schäfer and
Hans-Jürgen Becker with Gottfried Reeg assisted by Anja Engel, Kerstin Ipta, Uta Lohmann, Martina Urban and Gert Wildensee

This is a synoptic presentation of the most important textual evidence of the Talmud Yerushalmi. Edited for the first time are the famous 'Leiden' and 'Vatican' manuscripts and the so-called Sirillo manuscripts 'Paris/Moscow' and 'London' together with the editio princeps 'Venice', the printed editions 'Constantinople' and 'Amsterdam' as well as the Talmud Yerushalmi collections in 'En Ya'aqov and in Yalqut Shim'oni.

**I/6-11 Ordnung Zera'im –
Traktate Terumot bis
Bikkurim**

1992. 500 pages (est.) large quarto format (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 35). ISBN 3-16-146006-6 cloth \$ 250.00 (est.) – December

**I/3-5 Ordnung Zera'im –
Traktate Demai bis Shevi'it**
1992. V, 321 pages large quarto
format (Texte und Studien zum
Antiken Judentum 33). ISBN
3-16-145924-5 cloth \$ 199.00

**I/1-2 Ordnung Zera'im –
Traktate Berakhot und Pe'a**
1991. XVII, 401 pages large
quarto format (Texte und Stu-
dien zum Antiken Judentum
31). ISBN 3-16-145849-4 cloth
\$ 217.50

Messiah and Christos
Studies in the Jewish Origins
of Christianity. Presented to
David Flusser on the Occasion
of His Seventy Fifth Birthday.
Edited by Ithamar Gruenwald,
Shaul Shaked and Gedaliahu
G. Stroumsa

This is a collection of signifi-
cant new studies, by prominent
specialists. The general theme is
messianism in Jewish writings,
in early Christianity, and in
other cultures, notably ancient
Iran. Particular emphasis is
placed on the Dead Sea Scrolls.

1992. VIII, 240 pages (Texte und
Studien zum Antiken Judentum
32). ISBN 3-16-145996-2 cloth
\$ 136.00

Giuseppe Veltri
Eine Tora
für den König Talmi
Untersuchungen zum Über-
setzungsverständnis in der
jüdisch-hellenistischen und
rabbinischen Literatur

The work contains a presen-
tation and detailed analysis of
all passages of Rabbinic litera-
ture concerning the Septua-

gint. Contrary to the prevailing
opinion that the Septuagint
was rejected by the Rabbis on
the account of its appropri-
ation by the Christian church
the author shows that, in fact,
it was highly valued in the
Rabbinic tradition. However it
was not considered to have
been intended for Jews but for
the Hellenistic-Egyptian king
Ptolemy ("Talmi").

1992. 380 pages (est.) (Texte
und Studien zum Antiken Ju-
dentum). ISBN 3-16-145998-9
cloth \$ 87.50 (est.) – December

Hanne Trautner-Kromann
Shield and Sword
Jewish Polemics against Chri-
stianity and the Christians in
France and Spain 1100 – 1500

The description and interpre-
tation of Jewish polemical
texts is the first attempt to give
an overall account of the rea-
sons for the Jewish polemics
in France and Spain in a Chri-
stian environment and in a
period decisive of the history
of European Jewry in the sub-
sequent centuries.

1993. 284 pages (est.) (Texts
and Studies in Medieval and
Early Modern Judaism). ISBN
3-16-145995-4 cloth \$ 100.00
(est.) – April

J.C.B. MOHR
(PAUL SIEBECK)
TÜBINGEN



Tradition or Modernity?

A Review-Essay by STEVEN BAYME

Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew. By NEIL GILLMAN. Philadelphia and New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1990. \$19.95.

Torah U'madda. By NORMAN LAMM. New Jersey and London: Jason Aronson Publishers, 1990. \$25.00.

BOTH OF THESE RECENT WORKS OF MODERN Jewish thought share much in common. Their authors occupy prominent positions at leading rabbinical seminaries and are addressing rabbis and future rabbis in terms of the contemporary ideological encounter with secularism. Each author also directs himself to the educated lay reader in an attempt to engage synagogue members ideologically. Both works are informed by considerable scholarship and philosophical learning, although neither work amounts to a work of philosophy per se. Each in its own way seeks to redefine programmatically the nature of Jewish identity today. Each author inclines to a traditionalist perspective, articulating the beauties of Jewish tradition for contemporary thinking Jews. Finally, and most importantly, both of these books amount to major restatements of the tensions between Jewish tradition and modern culture — seeking to incorporate the claims of modernity and its ethos of secularism, autonomy and personal conscience, and democratic norms within the rubric of Jewish tradition and to communicate the values of tradition in ways that will be salient to Jews living in the modern world.

Yet, if both works share similar points of departure, they clash sharply over conclusions, definitions, and understandings of Jewish values and identity. These differences far transcend the usual distinctions between Orthodox and Conservative Judaism. Rather, they amount to statements of profound conflict and a parting of the ways over the nature of authority in Jewish tradition. In that sense, to the extent that each author writes from the perspective of his own movement — Lamm that of Orthodoxy and Gillman that of Conservative Judaism — although neither claims official status as movement spokesman, these books communicate the impression that the gulf between Conservative and Orthodox Judaism has widened considerably.

As President of Yeshiva University, Lamm sets forth to explain the mission and motto of the institution that he heads. Long considered the flagship of Modern Orthodoxy, Yeshiva mandates a dual curriculum of

STEVEN BAYME is National Director, Communal Affairs, for the American Jewish Committee.

religion and secular studies. In the 1960s, Yeshiva felt little compulsion to justify secular education as a worthy pursuit. On the contrary, its leaders and faculty boldly proclaimed the excitement of synthesis — integrating the best values of Torah and western culture. This synthesis sharply distinguished itself from both those who rejected secular values entirely, save for vocational purposes, and from those who embraced uncritically all facets of contemporary culture. Rather, Yeshiva sought to develop an integrated Jewish personality — one at home both in the world of the Talmud and in that of Kierkegaard, and struggling to determine what, if any, relationships existed between the two.

However, as Lamm notes in his Preface, the idea of *Torah U'Madda* (Torah and secular knowledge) has come under increasing attacks in recent years. The intellectual climate within American Orthodoxy often restricts the desirability of secular education to the strictly utilitarian purposes of enabling one to earn a living. Lamm seeks to engage these right-wing critics of *Torah U'madda* and to restore a sense of mission and excitement to Yeshiva's ideals.

His point of departure is Jewish law, which remains binding as the core aspect of contemporary Jewish identity. To be sure, Lamm understands halakhah as, at best, minimum Judaism. However, the halakhic framework is essential for maintaining Jewish tradition and identity in the modern world.

Within that primacy of Torah and halakhah, Lamm mounts an eloquent plea for the role and place of secular education. Heavily influenced by Maimonides and the hasidic doctrine of Divine immanence permeating all of Creation, he argues that Torah knowledge includes secular knowledge, which is all a part of the cosmic Divine holiness. Although this argument closely parallels Maimonides' elevation of secular education, or, specifically, the study of general philosophy, into a religious imperative, Lamm is perhaps most brilliant and original in evoking mystical and hasidic sources to address these issues.

Given his defense of secular education within Torah, he proceeds to outline three possibilities for the outcome of the encounter between *Torah* and *Madda*. Following Samson Raphael Hirsch, we should strive for co-existence — with little interaction between these two types of knowledge. Ze'ev Falk argues for a Hegelian synthesis, in which the theory of *Torah* and its antithesis of *Madda* will clash in a higher understanding, or synthesis, of Judaism and modern scholarship. Lamm himself prefers a model of symbiosis in which each world will enhance the other but will stop short of significantly altering its counterpart.

Lamm's program, in short, sets forth an ideological vision of education today at Yeshiva University. Although he concedes that not all will accept this vision of *Madda* as containing value in itself, all will allocate at least an instrumental or utilitarian role for the presence of secular education within Yeshiva's curriculum.

Yet, if this work aims towards a new restatement of the encounter of tradition and modernity, it abandons, in many ways, many of the claims of synthesis set forth by Modern Orthodox exponents. Most strikingly, Lamm ignores all references to contradictions or conflicts between secular knowledge and Torah knowledge. Certainly, for example, one may claim that knowledge of archaeology will enrich our understanding of the Bible. But Lamm offers the serious student of archaeology little or no guidance should archeological research contradict traditionalist assumptions about Scripture.

More generally, Lamm slights the entire tradition of academic Jewish studies or *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Although he unabashedly acknowledges its presence and importance, his only advice to the serious Jewish historian is to consider whether knowledge of Torah might enrich the historian's craft — a rather superficial exhortation to the practitioners of *Wissenschaft* that they might benefit from knowledge of Talmud and Midrash — but no guidelines as to whether historicist findings and research can be absorbed by Torah even if they contradict aspects of its literal meaning.

This slighting of academic Jewish studies may explain the most striking omission in Lamm's treatment: the absence of even the slightest reference to Nachman Krochmal, perhaps the most profound exponent of synthesis among modern Jewish thinkers. Krochmal saw his mission as sensitizing contemporary Orthodoxy to the importance of time and historical scholarship. For him, history connoted the essential and critical challenge to traditional faith. In evoking, for his major philosophical work, the Maimonidean title of a modern "Guide for the Perplexed," Krochmal underscored the need for a new synthesis — not between Torah and Greek philosophy but between Torah and historical criticism. This new version of synthesis amounts to a plea for freedom of inquiry and research, coupled with a theology of history which perceives the Divine Spirit as working within history. Krochmal's synthesis, in short, seeks to include historian and believer within a single model while accepting the integrity of both. Regrettably, Lamm's silence on Krochmal underscores a more general bias against permitting secular values to influence traditional Jewish thought, as well as a particular desire to minimize conflict between the world of *Torah* and the world of *Madda*. Although the teachings of *Torah* can profitably be applied to the major ethical and intellectual dilemmas of contemporary times, Lamm allocates little room for the potential influence of secular culture upon the formulation and shaping of *Torah* values.

In short, Lamm mounts an eloquent plea for the role of *Madda* within the world of *Torah*. He aims to persuade Orthodoxy's ideological right-wing both to respect the pursuit of *Madda*, and, programmatically, to accept that the practice of *Torah* and *Madda* need not be alien to the world of *Roshei Yeshivah*. In this latter sense, Lamm's work should be placed in

the more general context of Orthodoxy's shift to the ideological Right. In other words, even as Lamm seeks to define a "Centrist" Orthodoxy, other voices within Yeshiva call for increased isolation from the general society and general culture. In seeking to placate these voices, he minimizes the intellectual doubts raised by modern science and historical scholarship as well as the excitement and challenge of wrestling with two competing claims or avenues for truth and the effort to find common ground between them. Lamm's ideological redefinition goes so far even as to legitimize the instrumentalist or utilitarian view of secular education, which the author himself denigrates. To be sure, it may succeed in legitimizing Centrist Orthodoxy for the Orthodox Right. It fails, however, to address the central question of modern Jewish identity: why be Jewish in a world in which the claims of modern culture are so attractive and skepticism towards traditional values is so rampant?

The sociological context, of course, is critical, for Modern Orthodoxy remains an embattled group. It continues to suffer the reproaches of those on the right who pillory it as a phony or watered-down version of traditional Judaism. Lamm's efforts to maintain Modern Orthodoxy's integrity and vitality therefore clearly merit communal support.

Yet, precisely given this context, Lamm's perception of *Torah U'Madda* appears too limited. Yeshiva's uniqueness lies in its capacity to transcend becoming a yeshivah by day and a college by night. Even Lamm's right-wing critics have long sanctioned evening college courses. Rather, a true synthesis represents a sincere effort to grapple with the challenges of modern culture, to take with equal seriousness the respective claims of tradition and modernity, to explore secular culture for its potential to enhance our understanding of Judaic text and tradition, and to apply Jewish values to contemporary, social and ethical issues. That route, to be sure, is perilous. The claims of modern culture are so powerful that Orthodoxy fears, correctly, for future Jewish continuity. Yet, Yeshiva's distinctiveness lies precisely in its capacity to traverse that exciting, albeit dangerous, path.

If Lamm seeks to claim ground on which *Torah* values permit encounter with general culture, Neil Gillman emphasizes those avenues by which modern Jews may become inspired by *Torah* teachings. Like Lamm, Gillman is concerned with the encounter between tradition and modernity. He, too, is biased in favor of tradition. Unlike Lamm, however, Gillman is compelled to question how Jewish tradition — the "Sacred Fragments" — has been reshaped by modern values.

To be sure, the primary objective of *Sacred Fragments* is personal rather than programmatic. Gillman seeks to empower lay readers to develop their own theologies — informed, of course, by millennia of Jewish teachings. The book clearly emanates from encounters over a decade with Conservative synagogue members, and seeks to bridge the gap between the rich Judaic scholarship that prevails at the Jewish Theological Seminary

and the paucity of ideological controversy and Judaic knowledge that prevails within Conservative synagogues. If anything, Gillman's major contribution — both in this book and in his teaching and public lectures — has been to energize Conservative lay leaders and rabbis in the field on the ideological definition of Conservative Judaism, in turn strengthening the ideological salience of the movement to its critical constituencies.

Moreover, many of Gillman's insights will benefit even those most richly versed in Jewish literature and thought. He demonstrates, for example, how deeply Abraham Joshua Heschel was indebted to Yehudah Halevi. Similarly, his chapter on Jewish eschatology must be considered one of the most brilliant treatments of that perplexing topic.

Yet, dominating this virtual catalogue of Jewish theology, is a single startling and most controversial thesis. Gillman's starting point is that "Torah is entirely a Midrash" — a myth shattered by the onslaught of modernity, yet portions of which remain sacred and continue to speak to us as modern Jews.

In particular, it is modern critical scholarship which has shattered, for Gillman, our traditionalist myth. He claims that we must choose between a fundamentalist reading of Scripture in which everything remains sacred, and the critical reading, which challenges us to recover the *Sacred Fragments*. Because tradition functions as a myth, it by no means is irrelevant. The rituals and symbols of a myth are often most compelling — *vide* the power of Thanksgiving or the American flag. It does mean, however, that the authority of determining Jewish practice has shifted from the word of God, expressed through the rabbis, to the people of Israel and the community, for, ultimately, their actions will determine what claims a tradition shattered by modern scholarship may still exercise upon us.

By myth, Gillman does not mean fiction or falsehood. He defines myth as a structure — a vehicle by which the community makes sense of its experience. In that sense, the term midrash is probably more appropriate and certainly less threatening to the traditionalist reader. What is new is Gillman's willingness to subsume the entire corpus of tradition under the category of myth or midrash. Tradition is not binding because it was commanded by God; that, for Gillman, would amount to fundamentalism. Nor is it binding because it represents the historical experience of the Jews — a criterion long favored by Conservative Jewish thinkers. Rather, it is today our challenge as modern Jews to find ways in which tradition can speak to us meaningfully. In other words, can its myths become our myths?

To be sure, Gillman makes no claim to a redefinition of Conservative Judaism. He occupies no official position within the movement save as one trained in it and as a prominent member of the JTS faculty. Therefore, unlike Lamm, he sets forth no institutional programme. Yet, one cannot ignore the implications of this book, as the work of a prominent

Conservative theologian in dialogue with Conservative congregations, rabbis, and rabbinical students, for the movement's future.

First, and perhaps foremost, is the question of whether Jewish law remains normative and binding, or is it only part of the myth — some of which remains sacred while other aspects may be discarded. Gillman insists that Judaism remains a halakhic system but maintains that it is the community that will decide for itself what is a *mizvah* and what is purely optional. Clearly, Gillman's preferences lie with Rosenzweig and Heschel, for whom halakhah remained central to modern Jewish identity. Yet, by including halakhah within midrash, he leaves open the possibility for downgrading its importance the way we might otherwise disregard unreasonable *midrashim*.

For example, we may take three of the most divisive issues on the contemporary Jewish agenda — patrilineal descent, rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriages, and the acceptance of homosexual rabbis. The Reform and Reconstructionist movements have adopted relatively liberal positions on these issues on the grounds that halakhah is no longer binding. It exercises a voice rather than a veto. Orthodoxy rejects liberal positions on these issues as violations of Jewish law. Generally, the Conservative movement has sided with the Orthodox on these questions, partly on the grounds of history, and partly on the grounds of halakhah. Yet, Gillman rejects the Orthodox position as fundamentalist and locates authority within the community of Conservative Jews. Assuming, as recent research indicates, that the majority of Conservative laity would favor patrilineal descent and, perhaps, rabbinic officiation, Gillman's arguments virtually mandate redefinition of the movement's positions along these more liberal lines. Aside from further blurring distinctions between Conservative and Reform Judaism, such statements would signal the end of any remaining movement claims to represent halakhic Judaism. For, as Rabbi Joel Roth, one of the most perceptive exponents of Conservative Judaism as a halakhic movement, writes,

[O]nce talk of the absence of a system, or of a halachic system rather than the halachic system takes hold, . . . they do violence to the halachic system, and break the chain of authentic halachic authority . . . Since the rabbinic period, normative Judaism has been halachic. And it can remain normative only insofar as it remains halachic. If the "defenders of the faith" of our generation think that they meet the challenges of modernity when they advocate ideologies that undermine halacha and the halachic process, they are mistaken. Such ideological stances do not meet the challenges of modernity, they *fail* to meet its challenges.¹

Significantly, Gillman's position departs significantly from that of Solomon Schechter, a founding architect of Conservative Judaism.

1. See Joel Roth, "Halakhah and History" in Nina Beth Cardin and David Wolf Silverman, eds., *The Seminary at One Hundred* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary and the Rabbinical Assembly, 1987), pp. 287–288.

Schechter also argued that the community determines norms and standards. Yet, by the term “Catholic Israel,” Schechter and his successors meant the community of *committed* Jews. In other words, halakhah can evolve only through a process and dialogue within the halakhic community. Gillman, in pronounced contrast, transfers authority to the community *generally*, irrespective of halakhic parameters. Although Gillman repeatedly argues in favor of tradition, his position concerning authority owes more to Mordecai Kaplan than to Schechter.

Equally problematic is the radical pluralism which informs Gillman’s work. Myths themselves tend to be highly relativist, for what is salient to one individual may be heresy to another. Gillman leaves us with little guidance as to why we should select one myth at the expense of others. His theme — that “the text can come to mean whatever the community wants it to mean” — challenges us to question what are the limits of pluralism. Are there universal truths to Judaism if Torah is entirely a *mid-rash*?²

This radical pluralism is troubling on two counts. First, Conservative Judaism has always claimed authenticity in its understanding of Judaism and, therefore, has been critical of the other Movements. For Gillman, the difference between Conservative Judaism and the other Movements now becomes more a matter of personal taste rather than a conflict over basic values.

Even more telling is Norman Lamm’s criticism that “if everything is kosher, then nothing is kosher.” As laudable as it may be to include as many individuals and perceptions as possible under a Judaic umbrella, it has been the power of Jewish ideas and values that have made the Jews distinctive as a people. We cannot be all things to all people. Rather, the distinctiveness of Judaic ideas has been precisely the ability to underscore those ideas that we support, and negate those that we reject. Advocates of religious pluralism, to be sure, seek to cast their net widely. Yet, for Gillman, the parameters of the net lie entirely in the hands of the community. We are left, in short, with little sense of what, if any, are the limits of pluralism.

This theme emerges most strikingly in Gillman’s chapter on Jewish rituals. There, he clearly aligns Conservative Judaism with the liberal movements, in pronounced contrast to Orthodoxy. Gillman argues for greater utilization of ritual in personal and communal life. However, in emphasizing the symbolic importance of ritual, he abandons its binding and authoritative quality. At this point, differences between Conservative and Reform Judaism become primarily one of degree rather than of doctrine.

A traditionalist reader who perceives Judaism as halakhic, yet remains influenced by and sensitive to the claims of modern scholarship, will find himself or herself theologically homeless within these books. Both authors purport to address Jews caught between the attractions of

tradition and modernity. Neither will satisfy those who align with halakhic teaching but perceive modernity as a source of values with the power to enhance Judaism. Both books compel us to choose between tradition and modernity. A true synthesis of both value systems escapes each author — albeit for different reasons.

Perhaps both authors are only reflecting current sociological realities. Orthodoxy clearly is moving rightward, and Lamm's book represents a retreat from the bold and venturesome vision of synthesis so popular a generation ago. Gillman's work articulates what many Conservative lay people do — what Jacob Staub refers to as “the non-ideological nature of the attachment of so many of its members, who simply don't care, or act as if they don't care, about halacha.”² These prevailing attitudes of Conservative laity stand in direct contrast to the halakhic norms emanating from the Jewish Theological Seminary. In this sense, Gillman's book supports what many of the movement's left-wing critics, particularly those among the *havurot*, have long advocated — a shift in authority within the movement from rabbi as halakhic decisor to lay leadership as communal builders.

In the sociological sense, then, these works signify the growing distance in the Jewish community between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox. The problem of religious polarization will, doubtless, continue to dominate the Jewish communal agenda. At least as important, however, is the necessity for an ideology that will energize those Jews for whom halakhah remains authoritative, yet for whom the claims of modern culture are sufficiently powerful so as to warrant serious consideration not only in their own right but also in their capacity to influence Judaic values. That group, to be sure, may be numerically small. It does, however, have the capacity to serve as a bridge between the movements and to overcome prevailing religious polarization. Moreover, it is precisely as a constituency caught in the dialectic of tradition and modernity that it promises the capacity to mold a distinctive Jewish identity anchored in the authority of Jewish values yet influenced by modern culture, norms, and critiques.

2. Jacob J. Staub, “Reflections on the Conservative Movement,” *Ibid.*, p. 302.

Groping for God

A Review-essay by ELLIOT N. DORFF

Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew. BY NEIL GILLMAN. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society. 1990. 289 pages.

The Healer of Shattered Hearts: A Jewish View of God. BY DAVID WOLPE. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990. 192 pages.

IT SEEMS ALMOST AN EON AWAY, BUT A short twenty-five years ago people were talking seriously about “the death of God.” The statement was not so much metaphysical as sociological: even if God existed and cared about us, people found that fact irrelevant to their lives.

Although the movement was heavily Christian in its language and in the identity of its exponents, it certainly bespoke the attitude of many Jews as well. Indeed, Jews were then, and have remained, the most secularized religious group in America. Aside from sociological, economic, and educational factors, this may well stem from the inherent structure of Judaism, in contrast to that of Christianity: one can be a Christian only in religious terms, but one can identify with the broader civilizational and ethnic factors which make up Jewish identity without asserting its religious core. Philosophical and practical problems abound in doing that, but a large percentage of Jews believe and act that way. In opinion polls they may profess a belief in God, but, for most, such a response is more of an assertion of respectability than a statement of a dynamic reality in their lives. Jews certainly attend synagogues with much less regularity and in much smaller percentages than Christians find their way into churches.

These two books, however, are part of a battery of evidence that Jews in increasing numbers are now seeking God. This is hardly a mass movement, but it is a distinct phenomenon in contemporary Jewish life, which manifests itself among Jews of all types. Some plunge into it with the zeal of the newly converted — and then, as often as not, leave it just as suddenly. This is especially true of Orthodox *ba’alei teshuvah* (repentants). Most Jews in a search for God are surprised at finding themselves engaged in it, recurrently uneasy about it, and maybe even embarrassed by it. They often are wary and skeptical.

Nevertheless, they yearn for a sense of meaning in their lives, for community, for an understanding of roots and goals, for an outlet for feelings, and for assurance that their struggles are not lonely and worthless. This may be triggered by a specific event, like the death of a parent,

ELLIOT N. DORFF is Provost, University of Judaism, Los Angeles, California.

or it may be a cumulative response to a nagging sense of emptiness in their secular lives. It is more typical of people over forty, when family and professional rhythms allow some time for reflection and when one feels a distinct need for it at that stage in adult development, but teenagers can intensely feel a need for God, and, indeed, so can people of any age.

How one goes about this search, however, can vary enormously, and these books represent two of the major ways of proceeding. Gillman's book grew out of many years of helping lay people and rabbinical students think through their own Jewish theologies. Its approach to God is, thus, philosophical. It is certainly not bloodless or sterile intellectualism; quite the contrary, it manages to explain the critical philosophical issues and the primary alternatives for dealing with them while reflecting the personal struggle which lead lay people to raise, and to respond to, those issues in the first place — quite unusual for a work in theology. Wolpe's method, by contrast, is literary. He plumbs Midrash and other Jewish and general literature in an attempt to respond to our contemporary need for God.

One very attractive feature of *Sacred Fragments* is its tone. Gillman clearly respects his lay students and readers. There is no condescension here; on the contrary, he presumes that, while those reading his book may know little about Jewish theology when they begin, they are intelligent people who can, and should, stretch to understand Jewish philosophy and even write some of their own. His descriptions of the issues and the principle alternatives for dealing with them are both clear and insightful, and they do not assume previous knowledge of either Judaism or philosophy; at the same time, though, they never talk down to the reader in explaining even relatively simple matters. In this book, we are all adults helping each other engage in our personal searches for God. Gillman is our group leader, not the repository of all knowledge or wisdom.

Several elements of style help this book accomplish its end. The author explains why he organized the book as he did, and he provides helpful bridge paragraphs to link one chapter to another. This clarifies the structure of the book in the mind of the reader, keeping the issues separate while yet showing their relationship to one another and why one leads from one to the other. Gillman has thankfully restrained himself from the scholarly penchant to write long footnotes, thus eliminating the ponderousness of many academic volumes. Instead, he notes citations to Biblical and rabbinic passages in the text, itself, and, at the end of each chapter, he provides a bibliography for further reading, where he cites the books that he discussed within the chapter and other readings on the same theme. These features, in addition to his clear, unaffected style of writing and his unusual ability to make complicated matters understandable and meaningful, make this, without exaggeration, the best introduction to Jewish thought in print.

In discussing each issue, Gillman presents each significant position sympathetically and yet objectively, identifying its strengths as well as its

weaknesses. This, however, is not just a random survey: Gillman builds toward his own vision of Judaism. He seeks an approach which is modern, honest, and rooted in traditional texts, thought, and practice. In this reviewer's opinion, he has succeeded admirably in doing so, and many of his readers may well adopt a position more or less similar to his.

With that, I have some reservations about Gillman's approach — and since he encourages people to create their own theologies and to share their thoughts with others, I would imagine that he would be glad that I do! He relies heavily on modern studies in anthropology and linguistics which describe the functioning of myths, rituals, and other forms of symbolic language, in responding to ultimate issues. We express ourselves that way because, in part, we cannot capture the meanings and values which we encounter in our experience in plain, descriptive terms. Moreover, matters of ultimate concern beg for responses framed with an aesthetic flourish — the kind that we find in myths, rituals, and other symbols — to express and enhance their emotional impact and to make the views and values which we espouse easier to transmit to others.

In many ways, such an analysis of religious stories and rituals is all well and good. It certainly frees us from having to deal with the spurious conflicts between science and religion which a literalist reading of Biblical texts produces, and, at the same time, it demonstrates why religious texts can, and should, be meaningful without always being literally true.

With those distinct advantages, though, come some hard questions. The first is the matter of truth. Are there some myths which are truer than others? If so, how do we determine that? If not, why choose one myth over another?

Gillman vacillates on this issue. In the early part of the book (pp. 28–30), he claims that an objective evaluation of myths is impossible:

We can never stand outside of the myth to measure its correspondence with reality, for we can never have a totally a-mythical perception of that reality. The issue is never myth or no myth, but which myth . . . We simply do not have an independent picture of that reality against which we can measure the myth, for we literally can not see the world except through the spectacles of our myth.

Nevertheless, according to Gillman, myths can at least be falsified (his example is the claim that the Holocaust victims suffered because of their sins) and may even be verified in at least a general way.

But myths are also not capricious inventions. They emerge originally out of our experience of natural and historical patterns. They may select, identify, and organize these specific patterns, but they can do all of this because the patterns are there to be seen, selected, and organized in the first place. They can then be seen to be roughly consistent with our experience of the world.

Later (p. 120), in fact, he claims that myths are “roughly comparable to the scientific truth of the more global and abstract of scientific theories

... such as in quantum mechanics or astronomy.” The “objective dimension” of myths, the patterns which are discovered, not invented, is what, according to Gillman, we call “revelation” (pp. 31, 47).

Nevertheless, when he lists four criteria for choosing one theology over another (pp. 32–33), the degree to which a given theology corresponds to our experiences of reality is not among them! Moreover, when he comes to discuss Jewish myths about the end of days, he says the following (p. 249):

Since the events that we describe lie completely beyond our experience, our formulations have to be taken as poetic, dramatic, impressionistic visions — never objective, scientific forecasts. They are in no way provable or disprovable. They do what great myths have always done: infuse meaning into our lives, generate emotion, mobilize us to action, inspire loyalty, and reveal unsuspected dimensions in our experience.

But how do myths about the admittedly unexperienced end of days “reveal unsuspected dimensions in our experience”? And how would we judge the truth or falsity of what the myths say about that which we have not experienced? Most interestingly, note that in this instance, when we have no experience against which to check a myth, Gillman describes myths totally without reference to their objective truth or falsity.

Clearly, then, the truth status of myths is something which Gillman has only partially worked out. It is, I agree, no simple matter (p. 29); we may, indeed, have to develop a sophisticated method which applies varying criteria to different kinds of stories — or to myths about differing topics. Moreover, we will need to test some stories which have ample evidence for their truth, some which articulate only one side of a multi-layered and controversial story, and some, like those describing the end of days, with virtually no evidence at all.

For all its difficulty, though, this is a crucial task, one which must be systematically addressed in all of its complexity, especially by someone who relies as much as Gillman does on seeing religious claims in the context of wider myths. We do, after all, find much meaning in stories which were never intended to be anything but fictions, and some such stories can do all the things on Gillman’s list — “infuse meaning into our lives, generate emotion, mobilize us to action, inspire loyalty, and reveal unsuspected dimensions in our experience.” But those myths which also claim to be true hold a status beyond such noble fictions, for they claim that, as an articulation of truth, I *should* believe them, whether I want to or not. It is not only that it would add to my life to believe them, or that I would feel more deeply rooted to my community if I did: religious myths claim that I *must* believe them because it is they, and not competing myths, which tell the truth about life and death. On the other hand, if I cannot distinguish true myths from false ones by at least a fairly consistent and reliable method, I am left with just a bagful of stories, some of which I may like and some not.

The second cluster of issues I would like to raise for Gillman's position follows directly from the first. It concerns the authority and durability of such a faith, and it is not so much an objection as a question. Gillman correctly notes (p. 28) that "People die for their myths, so coercive is their hold." Would people be willing to die for religious myths, though, if they see them as myths? Less dramatically and more commonly, would they desire to comply with Jewish law if they thought of God and revelation this way? And what is the staying power of a faith disabused of literalism? Or, put in a broader form, once we leave the stage of naive literalism by doubting its claims in our intellectual adolescence, can the faith to which we ultimately arrive as adults hold the same sway over us as the abandoned, simple-minded, but compelling beliefs of our childhood? In Paul Ricoeur's terms, which Gillman approvingly quotes (p. 55), can a "second, willed naivete" work? And can we transmit that faith in a dynamic and appealing way to the next generation?

I certainly hope that a sophisticated faith can be compelling and enduring, but I frankly do not know whether it can be. Fundamentalists the world over — and Jews among them — certainly exhibit more passion for their beliefs than those who hold any other form, and fundamentalists probably would more readily die for their beliefs than would others. Such zeal may not be good; perhaps a *diminution* in passion and a greater sense of perspective and calm are ultimately better for religion, the people adhering to it, and the rest of the world. Once we are disabused of our infantile literalisms and chastened by the experience of distrusting and ultimately rejecting the myths of our intellectual childhood, though, can we ever regain *enough* emotional fervor for our new religious synthesis to make it an integral and dynamic part of our lives, something for which we are, indeed, willing to sacrifice much and which our children will discern as such? And will the *masses* do this or only the few?

The facts are clearly not all in, for only very recently have people interpreted religious faith in terms similar to Gillman's. In the last two centuries, neither orthodox nor liberal positions have been entirely successful in motivating a living faith in Jews; both types have often produced sterile forms of religion and/or rebellion and disaffection. Ultimately, of course, only time will tell which is the most effective way of assuring the vitality and endurance of Judaism under conditions of modernity.

I to think, though, that Gillman's view of the authority of Jewish law must be modified if there is any hope of understanding and retaining the binding quality of Judaism. When describing his own position, he says this (pp. 49, 56–57):

The issue, then, is most emphatically *not* the very legitimacy of a religious or specifically Jewish sense of being obligated. Nor is it the legitimacy of behavioral obligations in the first place. What *is* at issue are the respective roles of God and human beings in grounding that sense of obligation and in shaping the specific content of what we are obligated, as Jews, to do. If modernity

has wrought a single, decisive transformation in the terms of this discussion, it is the insistence not that we be free from religious obligation, but that we take the authority on ourselves, or more accurately, that we share the authority with God, for we perceive God as having shared His authority with Israel . . .

This view denies neither the existence of parameters for what constitutes authentic Jewish behavior nor the fact of authority. It does insist, however, that both the parameters and the authority emerge out of the community. But once we deny verbal or propositional revelation, there is simply no escaping that conclusion. It is the community that decides for itself what will be considered *mitzvah* and it does so on its own authority.

I certainly agree that the community — in the form of its rabbis' decisions and its communal customs — decides how to shape the *content* of Jewish law in our day, but it does so not only on its own authority, but on God's. The Jewish tradition interpreted Deuteronomy 17:8–13 to give rabbis in each generation unequivocal authority to determine the proper interpretation and application of Jewish law in their time; this is *not* a modern transformation. One famous section of the Talmud (B. *Bava Mezia* 59b) openly denies to God any say in the matter, and, more importantly, in practice, the talmudic rabbis always acted on that basis: they never consulted God for their decisions, but, rather, produced them through their own efforts. On the other hand, though, they saw this process as suffused with God. God ordained that they, and not He, should decide how to apply the law:

“For it is a law for Israel, a ruling of the God of Jacob” (Psalms 81:5). If it is not a law for Israel, it is, as it were, not a ruling for the God of Jacob. Rabbi Kerisafa said in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: In the past, “These are the set times of the Lord” (Leviticus 23:4); from now on, “which you should call” (Ibid.). Rabbi Illa said: If you call them, they are My set times; if not, they are not My set times. (J. *Rosh Hashanah* 1:3 [57b]; cf. B. *Rosh Hashanah* 25a)

God also determined that nothing short of Divine revelation would take place through the rabbis' study and their decisions that, indeed, this was a more reliable form of revelation than prophecy had been (cf. B. *Bava Batra* 12a). As Gillman himself points out (p. 49), even a naturalist like Mordecai Kaplan finds some role for God in the shaping of the law. With full recognition of the significant role legitimately exercised by human beings in this process, then, I think that the Divine element must be underscored; otherwise, we can neither understand how the law has held sway in the past nor hope that it will hold sway in the future.

One other matter along these lines: the only hope of retaining commitment to a sophisticated faith is if, from early childhood, religious stories are told *as stories with a follow-up discussion of what in them is true and what is only imaginary*. (Shirley Newman's *A Child's Introduction to Torah* is a good example of how to do this.) Only if honesty and a keen sense of truth is cultivated about religious matters from the very beginning can there be reasonable hope that adults will associate religious claims with these qual-

ities. Only then is there a chance that people will be committed to their adult faith “with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their might.” Otherwise, religion will die the death of “Puff, the magic dragon” and will be, at best, a nostalgic memory of childhood. In other words, this element of the truth status of myths, as complicated as it is, will ultimately determine whether a faith such as Gillman’s can do the other things he wants it to do — “infuse meaning into our lives, generate emotion, mobilize us to action, inspire loyalty, and reveal unsuspected dimensions in our experience.”

There are two other matters in *Sacred Fragments* which I shall address in shorter form. Gillman claims, much as did the early exponents of the Reform Movement, that morality always takes precedence over rituals in Jewish law. As I have explained at some length elsewhere,¹ it seems to me that old maxim is badly flawed. In more cases than not, ritual forms and moral norms are intertwined in Jewish law (a fact which Gillman acknowledges). Moreover, there are a few cases where ritual adherence is preferred — as, for example, when the choice is between obeying parents and observing the Sabbath (B. *Yevamot* 5b). It certainly is true that rituals alone will not do and that scrupulous adherence to them will not excuse moral turpitude, as the Prophets eloquently proclaim, and it is also true that moral concerns influenced the way in which the rabbis interpreted and applied the ritual commandments. But it is not at all clear that, in the classical tradition, “morality is primary” (p. 46) in creating the Jew’s fellowship with God, even as a matter of emphasis.

Finally, the discussion of prayer in *Sacred Fragments* is the aspect of Gillman’s presentation that I find weakest. He notes (p. 58) that prayer is sometimes done mechanically, and he has a nice discussion of the problem of adjusting the liturgy to our own beliefs and sensitivities (pp. 236–242), but nowhere does he probe the other philosophical issues that are involved in prayer. Why should I pray? How should I understand the answers to my prayer, if there be any? How should I understand the balance between the fixed elements in Jewish prayer (its liturgy, its times for prayer) and the need for spontaneous expression? In what ways is prayer an avenue to knowledge of, and encounter with, God? Prayer is certainly more than ritual (the subtitle under which Gillman discusses it), and it is too important an element of the Jewish religious experience not to be addressed fully.

Prayer, though, is the most complex of religious phenomena and, thus, the aspect of religion which lends itself least well to philosophical analysis. For that reason, liturgical and literary treatments of prayer often come closer to articulating our experience of it than do philosophical discussions. This is precisely the strength of a book like David Wolpe’s.

1. Elliot N. Dorff, *Mitzvah Means Commandment* (New York: United Synagogue Youth, 1989). pp. 7–9, 223–230.

Wolpe, like Gillman, seeks to encourage each reader to grope for God in an individual search. *The Healer of Shattered Hearts*, in fact, opens with the passage from the *Pesikta* (a book of homiletical midrash) which asserts that God revealed Himself at Sinai to each individual in a personal and unique address, according to his or her abilities and sensibilities. This includes our intellects; Wolpe specifically declares (p. 7) that a proper faith can be “neither anti-intellectual nor anti-rational.” But philosophy is not key for Wolpe. While philosophy “can smooth the crags of coarse belief, refine it, . . . faith springs from deep in the soul, the inaccessible point where individual conscience touches upon what is larger than itself and apprehends its place and purpose.” He goes further: argument, he suggests (p. 6), is closely allied with embarrassment, presumably the embarrassment of either not knowing how to explain one’s interrelationship with God or, even more embarrassing, not experiencing God in the first place. He therefore aims to “present an idea, an image of the faith of the Rabbis, and to explore how this can be translated in our time.” He does not aspire to persuade; he only wants to share enthusiasm (p. 7). As he puts it (p. 17), “Images culled from the tradition, however imprecise, can enable us to begin *feeling* our way toward God, a process no less important and certainly not less lasting than the cognitive paths hewn out by systematic thinkers” (my italics; cf. pp. 48, 81).

Wolpe thus attempts to evoke the feelings which have led the tradition to speak of God, the “ports of entry” (p. 52) through which God becomes manifest to us. He thus explores what the tradition means when it describes God as friend, parent, and lover. In one of this most effective passages, he points out the special qualities of night as a time to feel God. (A philosophic skeptic might say, “Ah yes, precisely when one cannot see the light of day!”) And, in sharp contrast to Gillman, Wolpe’s discussion of prayer (pp. 98–105) speaks not to the form of prayer, but to the emotions which rouse it.

It is no surprise, then, that the strengths of this book are emotional and its weaknesses intellectual. His discussion of how we can understand the acting of God in history (p. 87–8), for example, raises the question but hardly does justice to it in proposing only one answer and then not dealing with its weaknesses. At one point (p. 133) he says that “however much it may seem limiting or ‘anthropomorphic’ to speak of God understanding our feelings of displacement, it is surely more limiting to suggest God cannot understand.” Later (p. 150), however, he reneges on his unabashed anthropomorphism:

What it means for God to suffer we can never truly know. Clearly the tradition does not conceive of it as analogous to human suffering, because Judaism has ever been unequivocal in its insistence that God is not human. Where intellectual faculties fail, the heart must have its say. Understanding what it means for God to suffer is less important than the vivid beauty of the image . . .

He clearly does not want to deal with the hard issues involved in depicting God in human terms — or refusing to do so. And when it comes to the problem of evil, he expresses his aversion to philosophical approaches plainly (p. 152):

Even the most powerful promptings of abstract argument melt away when confronted with the heat of human anguish. The practice of theodicy, the attempt to justify God in an evil world, is an enterprise whose rules are written by the sufferers of history and not by its logicians.

Many sections in *The Healer of Shattered Hearts* are aesthetically beautiful and emotionally evocative. Some are reminiscent of passages in Heschel — but Wolpe's are always clearer and often more effective. In that sense, Wolpe has accomplished his goal. But, in the end, this reviewer is wary of a theology which meets one on an almost exclusively emotional plane. Wolpe's theology is not particularly objectionable, but if the rules of the game are solely emotional (despite a few of his disclaimers to the contrary), what is to prevent a view of God masquerading as Jewish while making outrageous statements about God, humanity, and the world?

In other words, this writer longs for a book which strikes a middle ground between Gillman's address to the mind and Wolpe's elicitation of the soul. Surely it should be possible to construct an approach to Judaism which is intellectually honest and, yet, emotionally effective. These books excellently carry out the disparate tasks which they set for themselves, but I yearn for a book which combines and integrates both approaches. Maybe I will try to write one!

Oxford**The Joys of Hebrew**LEWIS GLINERT,
University of London

From *Acharon* to *Zohar*, this informative and often humorous dictionary features over six hundred Hebrew words and expressions. The first such guide to Hebrew, this volume is more than a mere lexicon—it is a jubilant celebration of Hebrew itself, a treasure trove of Jewish wit, wisdom, culture, and tradition.

1992 304 pp. \$22.00

*Forthcoming!***Narrative in the Hebrew Bible**DAVID M. GUNN, *Columbia Theological Seminary*, andDANNA NOLAN FEWELL, *Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Texas*

After almost two centuries of historical criticism, biblical scholarship has recently taken major shifts in direction, most notably toward literary study of the Bible. This study provides a lucid guide to the interpretive possibilities of this movement.

*(Oxford Bible Series)*May 1993 288 pp.
paper \$16.95 cloth \$72.00**Her Share of the Blessings****Women's Religions among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World**ROSS SHEPARD KRAEMER,
Franklin and Marshall College; University of Pennsylvania

"A bold new synthesis of the sources for women's religions in the Greco-Roman world which historians of women (including Kraemer herself) have painstakingly collected and analyzed over the past decades. This book is rare in that it is a truly sympathetic reading of the full variety of available sources on women's religion."

—Bernadette J. Brooten, *Harvard University, The Divinity School*
1992 288 pp.; illus. \$24.95**Chaim Weizmann****The Making of a Statesman
Volume 2**JEHUDA REINHARZ,
Brandeis University

"This scholarly work, when completed with a third volume, will be the definitive biography of this towering figure of twentieth-century Zionism."—*Booklist*
This massively researched, deftly written narrative follows Weizmann's life from the beginning of the First World War through some of his greatest triumphs—the Balfour Declaration, the founding of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the British Mandate for Palestine.

January 1993 576 pp.; illus. \$40.00

*New in paperback!***Arnold Schoenberg****The Composer as Jew**ALEXANDER L. RINGER,
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

"No other writer has come nearly as close to identifying the essential roots and connections of Schoenberg's remarkable intellect as a Jewish composer. This fine book is not only an excellent historical and cultural examination of a great composer and his times but also a probing analysis of how, for Schoenberg, the Jewish God and the unity of the musical idea were essentially intertwined."—*Shofar*

1990 (paper 1992) 288 pp.; illus.
paper \$18.95 cloth \$58.00**The United States and the State of Israel**DAVID SCHOENBAUM,
University of Iowa

Schoenbaum's book is a history of one of the most remarkable liaisons in international experience, a portrait of the special relationship between the last remaining superpower and the tiny Jewish state between Jordan and the Mediterranean, and a study of how that relationship grew and works.

January 1993 432 pp. \$35.00

*Prices are subject to change and apply only in the U.S.**To order, send check or money order to: Humanities Marketing, Dept. MG**To order by phone using major credit cards please call 1-800-451-7556***Oxford University Press**

200 Madison Avenue • New York, NY 10016

Book Review

The German-Jewish Economic Élite, 1820-1935: A Socio-Cultural Profile. By W.E. MOSSE. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. 369 pp.

Reviewed by MARSHA ROZENBLIT

ONE OF THE central issues in modern Jewish history is the degree to which Jews have "assimilated," that is, abandoned the world of the traditional Jewish community in order to become integrated members of Western culture and society. In this excellent, well-documented, and extremely interesting book, the eminent British historian, Werner Mosse, has explored the limits of integration into German society of the very richest Jews in Germany, a group which should have had the best chance of all for full integration.

Mosse uses as the foil for his discussion the position taken by the Israeli scholar, Gershom Scholem, in a very interesting essay, "On the Social Psychology of the Jews in Germany: 1900-1933" (in David Bronsen, ed., *Jews in Germany from 1860-1933: The Problematic Symbiosis* [Heidelberg, 1979]). There, Scholem had argued that, unlike most Jews who retained a large measure of Jewish ethnicity, Jewish millionaires in Germany were utterly assimilated, had rejected Jewish identity, strove only for close ties and full integration in Gentile society, and tried to ignore the anti-Semitism that they encountered. Mosse deems this argument a "simplistic" stereotype. Relying on the memoirs, personal papers, and letters of Germany's Jewish economic elite, he presents a sensitive and nuanced group portrait, revealing how these people balanced their Jewish identities with their desire for acceptance in Germany.

Mosse convincingly argues that most very rich German Jews in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries retained a Jewish identity, whether out of sentimental attachments, filial piety, or defiance in the face of anti-Semitism. More importantly, they maintained Jewish ethnic cohesiveness, thus forming a distinct sub-culture in Germany and within Jewish society. The level of Jewish religious observance in the group may have been very low, but most of them remained bound to their fellow Jews through very strong economic, social, and kinship networks. Indeed, family ties provided the matrix of economic and social life, thus inhibiting social integration with non-Jews. In general, wealthy Jews did business with each other, socialized with each other, formed their closest friendships within the Jewish elite, and married each other. Whether by choice or necessity, even the most wealthy Jews in Germany were ethnically Jewish in their personal and social lives. Moreover, most wealthy Jews retained a strong sense of Jewish solidarity, which they expressed in activism on behalf of Jewish causes, whether to combat anti-Semitism or to help the suffering Jews in Russia. Thus, wealth did not necessarily lead to the abandonment of the Jewish people, as Scholem had posited.

The strength of Mosse's book lies in his depiction of the closed social world of the German-Jewish elite. He provides fascinating insight, for example, into the marriage strategies of wealthy German Jews, who maintained Jewish ethnic cohesion by parental "pre-selection" of suitable mates for their children. In the majority of cases, by controlling the sociability of their sons and daughters, wealthy Jews saw

MARSHA ROZENBLIT is Associate Professor of History, University of Maryland, at College Park, Md.

to it that their children married the offspring of other wealthy Jewish families, thus cementing already existing economic, social, and ethnic alliances, and thereby guaranteeing Jewish survival. Mosse shows that, unlike the Jewish middle class, the elite eschewed arranged marriages, rarely fussed about dowries, and sometimes married for love. Still, financial, familial, and ethnic concerns intersected to generate high endogamy rates.

On the other hand, of course, full integration into German non-Jewish society was never possible even for those who devoutly wished it, even for the baptized, even for the descendants of the baptized. Germany, after all, was not a pluralistic society tolerant of ethnic diversity. More importantly, the rise of aggressive anti-Semitism after the 1870s rendered full acceptance of the Jews impossible in most German circles, with the important exception of intellectuals and the political left. Whatever limited sociability existed between Jews and Gentiles in the early and mid-nineteenth century, it evaporated at the century's end. Jewish/Gentile relationships which did exist were highly self-conscious, based usually on material considerations or on shared outsiderhood, and often reflected social inequalities. The status equals of the Jewish elite, wealthy non-Jewish businessmen, would not socialize with or marry wealthy Jews. Jewish men who insisted on marrying Gentiles had to "pay a price," that is, marry someone with less social prestige.

Baptized Jews suffered most of all from the refusal to recognize Jews as Germans, and Mosse does well to include them in his analysis. He documents at length the painful experiences of one Paul Wallich, for example, a wealthy Jew baptized at birth, whose Jewish origins hindered his attempts to enter German high society at the university, in the army, in marriage, in friendship. Wallich, like most other baptized Jews in Germany, socialized with other baptized Jews, forming yet another "Jewish" sub-culture in Germany. While, in the early nineteenth century, some baptized Jews did manage full integration, the emergence of racial anti-Semitism at the end of the century rendered total Jewish integration absolutely impossible — at least for men.

One is struck here by the significant difference between the experiences of men and women. Men could never jettison their Jewish backgrounds, but Jewish heiresses willing to convert to Christianity could marry into the German aristocracy, presumably because many noblemen appreciated the large dowries that these Jewish women brought with them into marriage. The nobility would not marry its daughters to Jews, but it would marry its sons to Jews, undoubtedly thinking that women simply bear the identities of their husbands. Thus, sexist attitudes toward women enabled one group of rich Jews to assimilate fully. Does this intermarriage pattern tell us that Jews really wanted to intermarry but were generally unable to do so only because of anti-Jewish prejudice? Some information on the number and proportion of Jewish women who succeeded in marrying into the German aristocracy could help answer this question.

The limits of Jewish integration extended beyond the private sphere of sociability and family into the public sphere as well. Mosse documents at great length how wealthy Jews had absolutely no influence on German public life, especially after the 1870s and 1880s. They had no influence in parliament, the political parties, or the bureaucracy. Jews had no impact at all on political or economic policy-making, even when, like Bismarck's famous private banker and financial advisor, Gerson von Bleichröder, they were poised to do so. Here, the fate of Walther Rathenau, a wealthy Jewish industrialist, who was made Foreign Minister in 1922 and was murdered by

right-wing thugs shortly afterwards, becomes paradigmatic for the possibilities of a Jewish role in public affairs. Of course, anti-Semitism was not the only obstacle to Jewish participation in German public and political life. The social and political structure of Germany (at least before the Weimar Republic) vested power in the hands of the aristocracy, a group which even baptized Jewish men could not join. Moreover, as commercial entrepreneurs, Jews stood outside the powerful interests of heavy industry, agriculture, or organized labor. Jews, thus, were doubly burdened, both by their place in the economy and by their Jewishness, in a society which resented them on both counts.

Only in the realm of culture could Jews play a prominent role, as important cultural figures in the early nineteenth century, and as patrons, collectors, and consumers of culture at the end of the century. Mosse reiterates historian Peter Gay's argument that these cultural figures made their contributions as acculturated Germans, not as Jews. The world of culture fully accepted Jews as equals. One wonders, of course, why that was so.

In *The German-Jewish Economic Élite*, Werner Mosse has made an extremely convincing case for the continued ethnic cohesiveness of the wealthiest Jews in Germany. Like all good books, of course, it has a few minor problems. Although the author frequently points to differences between the early and late nineteenth century, he should have been more sensitive to changes over time. The strength of the book lies in his anecdotes about individuals, but Mosse might have presented fewer anecdotes, condensed the book somewhat, and relied less heavily on extensive German quotations in the text and in the footnotes. Moreover, while the absence of statistics is appreciated, one might have liked some sense of what proportion of the elite retained some religious observance, or was baptized, or was active in Jewish life, or retained a sense of Jewish solidarity.

Mosse might also have tried to present more information about women in the elite. He assumes that they pushed their men into greater assimilation, but Marion Kaplan's work on Jewish middle class women reveals the lower level of assimilation among women as compared to men. One would like to know more about these women, including the nature of their relationships to their non-Jewish servants and to non-Jewish women of their class.

A further problem is Mosse's assumption that the elite had the best chances for full integration. One wonders why that would be true. Would not the very poor have the best chances for total integration? Todd Endelman's work on British Jews reveals an extremely high level of assimilation precisely among the poor. It is true that by the late nineteenth century there were virtually no poor German Jews. They had prospered, or migrated to America, or perhaps they had disappeared through total integration. Still, Mosse's point about the limits of integration for the elite holds true. Why, then, did the Gentile *haute bourgeoisie* refuse to socialize with or marry Jews? Mosse accepts this fact as a given without speculating about its causes.

The German-Jewish Economic Élite raises many questions about the limits of Jewish integration in modernity. Clearly, in Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany both the class and status structure of society and the reality of anti-Semitism rendered full Jewish integration impossible. What, though, is the future of Jewish integration in a more tolerant society? To what extent is Jewish ethnic cohesiveness the result of anti-Semitic exclusion, and to what extent do Jews stick together simply because they want to, or find it natural to do so? These questions remain the central ones for Jews in the late twentieth century.

CELEBRATE FIFTY YEARS OF JEWISH LITERARY CREATIVITY

Jewish Book Annual: Volume 50, 1992-93 **The American Yearbook of Jewish Literary Creativity**

EDITED BY DR. JACOB KABAKOFF

For 50 years, the *Jewish Book Annual* has recorded American Jewish literary creativity and Jewish-interest book production. It gives a broad overview of the Jewish literary contributions in Israel and other countries. The *Annual* contains selected lists of Jewish-interest books published in the U.S., England and Israel, and annotated bibliographies of works of fiction and non-fiction written in English, Hebrew and Yiddish.

SPECIAL FEATURES IN VOLUME 50:

- Jewish Thought: On the Emergence of a Genre
by Eugene B. Borowitz
 - Anglo-American Jewish Writing: The Shifting Center
by Harold Fisch
 - David Grossman's Useful Fictions
by Joseph Lowin
 - Fifty Years of Jewish Children's Books
by Marcia W. Posner
-

RAVE REVIEWS:

"...a literary delight..." - **American Jewish Archives**
"...a fine educational instrument..." - **Jewish Education**
"...an invaluable guide to current publications and literary trends..." -
London Jewish Chronicle

\$35.00, plus \$3.50 S&H US & Canada; \$5.50 Overseas.
Available through the Jewish Book Council:
15 East 26th Street, New York, NY 10010-1579 (212) 532-4949

**ANNOUNCING
THE NEW 20-YEAR INDEX
TO JUDAISM: 1972-1991**

Available now!

**Guarantee the permanent value of all your copies of
JUDAISM**

(Limited quantities of 1952-1971 index are still available, at the same price as the new index, payable by separate check.)

Please mail your check or money order, for \$7.50, payable to

JUDAISM
15 E. 84th St.
New York, NY 10028.

JUDAISM

MAG 88 BWR 18 NO FP-2430-1-1-P21

JUDAISM MAG.- WIN 1993



\$6.00

WINTER 1993